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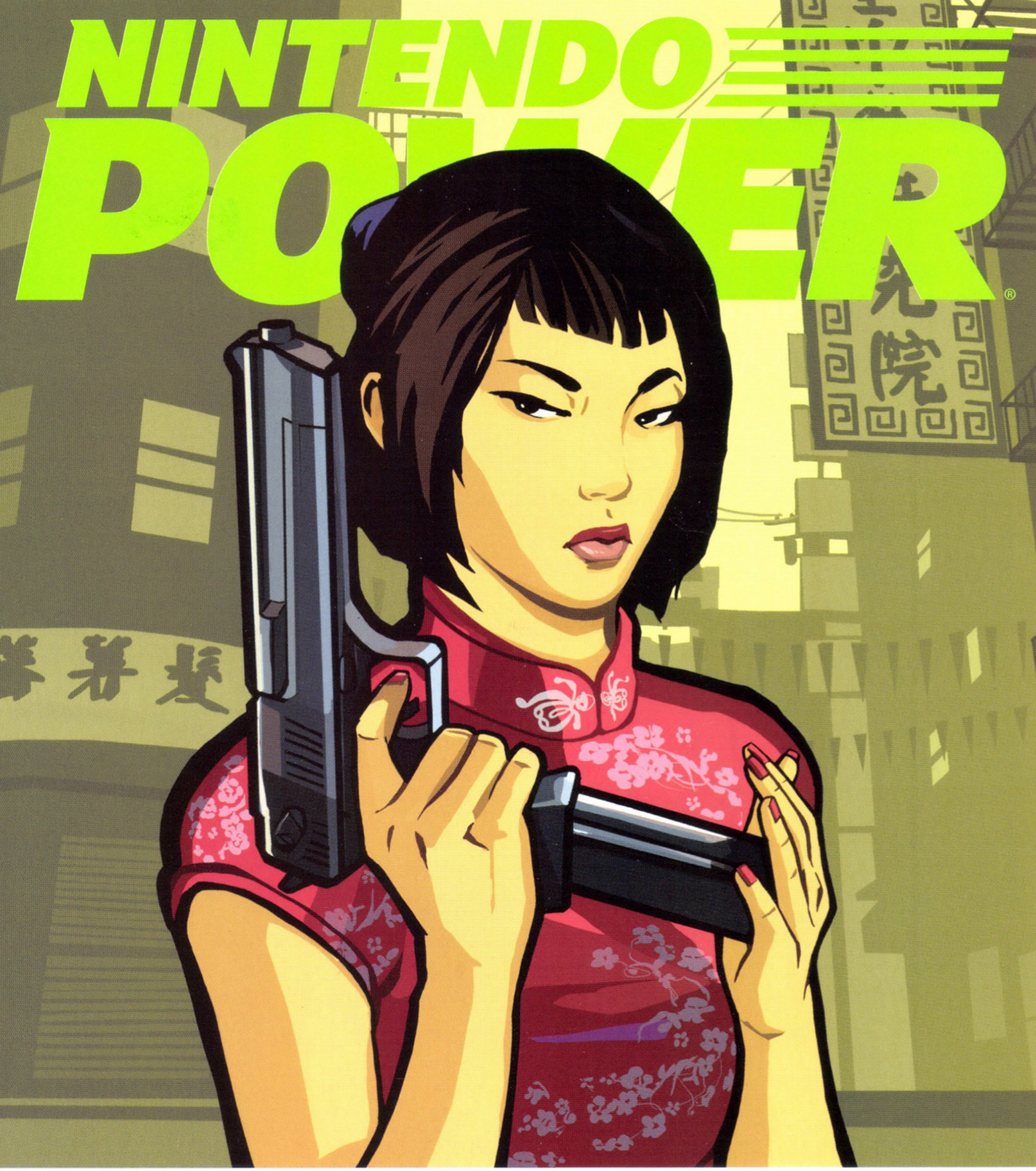

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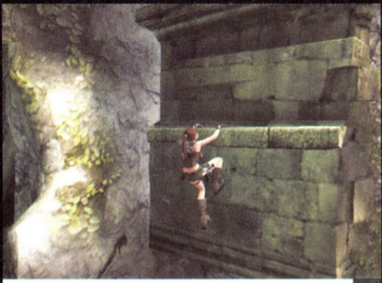
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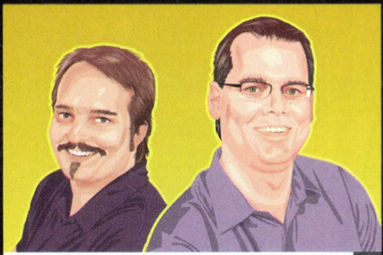
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DS = NINTENDO DS
NES = NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWare

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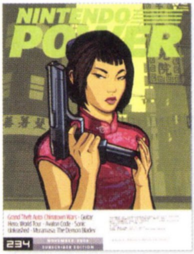
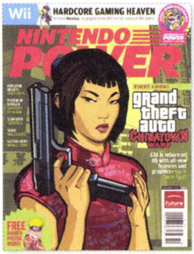
Pulse

A Picture Says a Thousand Words

Not only do we have a great issue for you this month (headlined by the amazing Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars), but we're also introducing a cool new feature for the magazine's most loyal readers. Starting this issue, subscriber copies come with a special version of the cover. This is the definitive collector's edition of the magazine, featuring wall-to-wall video game artwork unobscured by lots of text. We love our newsstand covers, but we cringe at having to crop or cover up gorgeous images. The subscriber editions are the copies that the NP team will put into our personal collections, and we hope that you'll enjoy them just as much as we will.



Subscriber edition (above) and newsstand cover (below).



CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

[LETTERS]

We've got a mixed mailbag this month with letters that cover everything from the new Wii MotionPlus peripheral to retro gaming. This month's special-topic request is The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, in honor of its 10th anniversary. What did you think when you first played it? What are your favorite memories? Write to us at the address on page 10.

TUNING OUT

I wouldn't be a Nintendo fan if it weren't for the Corneria theme in Star Fox for the SNES. I play an instrument and am always surrounded by classical music. I can play Beethoven's 9th Symphony *and* The Legend of Zelda theme. Anyway, I know a classical-music geek who said that video game music is trite and pitiful, and that it is poisoning our youth. I tried to show him *good* music like Kirby Air Ride's Checkered Knights and Star Wolf's theme from Star Fox Assault, but he called those pieces the worst things that had passed through his ears. I wish that people could understand that it's fun to play music from video games. Anyways, what do *you* think?

H-WII64

People can argue that a Game Boy tune isn't as technically sophisticated as a fully produced pop track or as structurally challenging as a symphonic composition, but what ultimately matters is the impact it has on an individual. When it comes to any form of art, what the artist puts into a piece isn't nearly as important as what a listener or viewer gets out of it, which I suppose is just another way of saying, "to each his own."

SUPER SONIC

After reading the letters in Volume 233 about game franchises that people would like to see done in a retro style similar to the upcoming Mega Man 9, an old thought resurfaced. Since Nintendo and Sega are no longer corporate rivals, why not make Sonic the Hedgehog 4 based on SNES specs? Sonic has appeared on most other systems, but haven't you wondered how the Blue Blur would play on Nintendo's old 16-bit console?

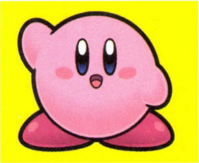
TOM N.

I love that idea! People who have played lots of games on both SNES and Genesis will tell you that each system has a distinctive look and sound, so a Super NES-style Sonic would feel unique. After living through the 16-bit console wars, just the thought of a Sonic adventure on SNES sends a shiver up my spine; it's like some game from an alternate dimension.

RIGHT BACK AT YA!

I don't think you give enough credit to the man in pink (and no, I don't mean Justin). Kirby is one of Nintendo's main stars, and you guys seem to neglect him, even with his new DS game coming up. In Volume 231's top 20 games for each system, you only mentioned him once. Kirby Canvas Curse is *way* better than Sonic Rush Adventure! Respect the pink!

JAKOB L.



Kirby is cute and cuddly...until he swallows you in one big bite and steals your soul.

Have you read this month's glowing review of Kirby Super Star Ultra? Or the feature that we ran last issue? Never fear, Jakob—our love for pink runs much deeper than Justin's swimwear.

EVOLUTION IS GOOD

I'm confused—Nintendo is making an attachment that "enhances motion-sensing capabilities"? I don't understand why the Wii remote wasn't designed with this kind of functionality in the first place. I would play with a longer remote if it improved the motion sensing, but it seems like a waste to have to buy a separate peripheral. What do you think?

DINOTHUNDER

As with any kind of technology, improvements become possible over time. My opinion is this: if the folks at Nintendo have found a way to make Wii motion controls

Next spring Nintendo's new Wii MotionPlus attachment will make motion control even better—so why is DinoThunder so upset?

even better, that's only a good thing. I'd be upset if they decided to sit on the improvements until the next system. Nintendo reps have said they intend to make the add-on inexpensive, and once you plug it in you'll rarely (if ever) need to take it off. It's all good!

AN ALL-STAR IDEA

Nintendo should release an updated Super Mario All-Stars [the SNES collection of Mario's original games with enhanced graphics and sound] for Wii. It could include Super Mario Bros. 1 through 3, The Lost Levels, Super Mario World 1 and 2, and the Super Mario Land games from the original Game Boy, all updated with better sound and 2.5-D graphics like New Super Mario Bros. for the DS. They could even include a nice booklet detailing the history of each game. This would be one heck of a collection that every real gamer, young and old, would put at the top of their wanted list. 15 years since All-Stars is a long enough gap!

BRIAN D.

Man, our readers are really knocking great ideas out of the park lately! I was absolutely blown away when All-Stars came out in '93—when you think of the hours and hours of legendary gameplay in that collection, it's got to be the single best cartridge ever made. A new, updated edition with a booklet, special packaging, and other cool collectibles would officially be the best thing ever. Throw in Mario's 3-D adventures, and Nintendo could charge me whatever it wanted.

ONE COOL GIRL

On Game Day at my old school, we could dress up as any video game character we wanted, so I went as Link (I'm a girl, but hey—I love The Legend of Zelda!). All the boys and some of the girls called me a nerd. I was ashamed and wanted to get out of the costume. To this day, even at my new school, my friends tell me that they are *still* making fun of me! What should I do?

META KNIGHT

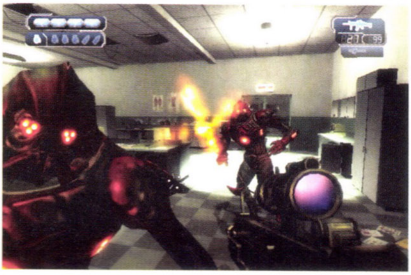
I know it's easier said than done, but you can't get too wrapped up in what they think. I guarantee you that a good portion of the people that just read your letter would appreciate seeing your costume, and some would even show you one of their own. If you don't know people who are into the same stuff as you, I'd suggest looking for clubs or groups that share your interests.

THE CHICKENS' SECRET

I recently read a letter in Pulse asking why the chickens in Zelda games are invincible. I've searched for the answer to this question my whole life, and I finally found it a while ago: Link is a vegetarian. It's true! Name one game where he has eaten meat (okay, some of the food in Smash Bros. is meat, but whatever). He is not a vegan, because he drinks Lon Lon milk. The only living thing that Link would ever eat is ChuChus, and they are meant to be killed and drunk for recovery (believe me; I have talked to Farore, Din, and Nayru about it).

RANDY W.

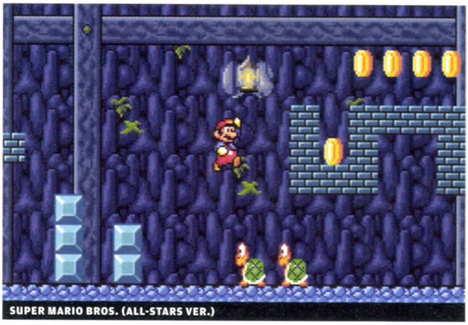
I want a Zelda game where you get to be the chicken—a full-on, 100-hour quest where you flap your wings, cluck, and peck at people. Who's with me?



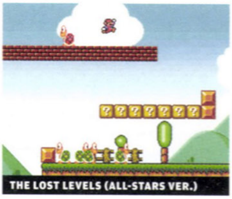
After reading about your Big 15 games in Volume 233, one title has stuck out in my mind: The Conduit. I am in awe of the amazing graphics and the intensity of the action visible in those screens. This game will hopefully raise the bar for other third-party developers and we may start to see less games that seem to have been thrown together in 10 seconds.

NICK S.

Having played the game ourselves, we couldn't agree more that The Conduit is a big-league title. It's gorgeous and beats even Metroid Prime 3's standard-setting controls, with customization options to fit the preferred specs of any hard-core shooter fan.



SUPER MARIO BROS. (ALL-STARS VER.)



THE LOST LEVELS (ALL-STARS VER.)

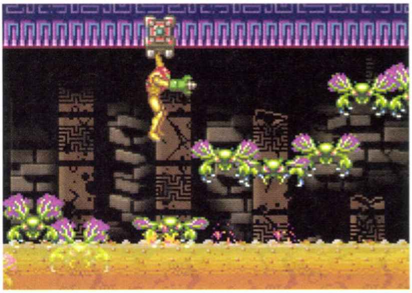
SUPER MARIO BROS. 2 (ALL-STARS VER.)

SUPER MARIO BROS. 3 (ALL-STARS VER.)

SUPER MARIO WORLD

Brian D. speaks the truth—we need another Super Mario All-Stars. The SNES original included enhanced versions of Super Mario Bros. 1 through 3, plus The Lost Levels (SMB2 in Japan). Later versions even added Super Mario World!

WHAT DIRECTION SHOULD THE METROID SERIES TAKE?



I think that the Metroid series needs to return to its roots at least once on the DS. A 2-D adventure with a better storyline (and perhaps more than the sub-three-hour experience of Metroid Fusion) would be just what Nintendo needs to further the series.

CLASSIC METROID FAN

Since the Metroid Prime games are supposedly over, I'd love to see a new side-scrolling Metroid on either the DS or Wii (or both!)—a little bit of retro mixed with all-new puzzles and villains. Maybe the developers could incorporate other hunters into the story, like Trace or Noxus (and don't forget about Ridley and Kraid, either). Throw away whatever timeline is in place, and just give us a blend of the best from each game.

DUSTIN G.

There should be a new game that takes place during Samus's past, showing how Ridley killed her parents and how the Chozo found her, plus her whole story about becoming a bounty hunter. I would personally like it to be a side-scroller (in my opinion, those are better than the series' 3-D games). It could be like New Super Mario Bros., which uses 3-D elements but is still played in 2-D.

(NO NAME GIVEN)

I would like to see a new Metroid game in 2-D, similar to how the new Wario Land was done, controlled with the Wii remote held sideways and played like the series' original side-scrollers. That would be awesome.

JORDAN

I recommend a third-person action-adventure game—like a nonscary Resident Evil 4. I can just imagine frantically jumping while enemies throw attacks at Samus. It could also require a bit of stealth. It would be great!

(NO NAME GIVEN)

Since Mario has been in a couple RPGs and Sonic now has his own RPG, I think Nintendo's first lady should give it a try. You could level Samus up, purchase new armor, and buy her new weapons.

LUCIANO O.

Like most other fans, I would like to see another 2-D Metroid (not that the 3-D games aren't any good). I would also like to see the series change a bit. I would love to see the Metroid universe through the perspective of another character, like Ridley (imagine Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, only with wings and fire).

TARK

As much as I want a new 3-D Metroid game, the series prides itself in its 2-D roots (Super Metroid!). I wholeheartedly want a sequel to Metroid Fusion that re-creates the atmosphere of the BSL research station. But even if it's not a sequel to Fusion, I just want to see Metroid in 2-D.

(NO NAME GIVEN)

I don't think we should have a new 3-D Metroid game until the next Nintendo system comes out. Instead, Nintendo should make a 2-D Metroid for the DS, and it should be a continuation of Metroid Fusion. As for the 3-D game, I would take the idea from the ending of Metroid Prime 3 (spoiler: where Sylux is following Samus). It could be called Metroid: Hunted, or something like that. I also think that it would be awesome to be able to freely fly your Hunter-class gunship around in space to different planets (sort of how sailing works in The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker).

ODDBALL

I want a Wii or DS game where Samus goes on a journey to find out her origin and where she really came from. Like, when you defeat a boss, you could collect a piece of her memory so that you have the full story by the end of the game.

(NO NAME GIVEN)

It's unanimous: everyone wants a new 2-D Metroid! Despite the greatness of the Prime trilogy, I agree that the series is at its best with one less dimension. It's certainly more of a platformer in 2-D, which is a part of the series I love. Hopefully we'll see Samus scrolling sideways on Wii or DS at some point in the years ahead.

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Understand that we are separate from Nintendo; we don't make the games.

You don't need to send us links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

There's no need to ask about the status of upcoming games; we'll always pass along any updates as soon as we get them.

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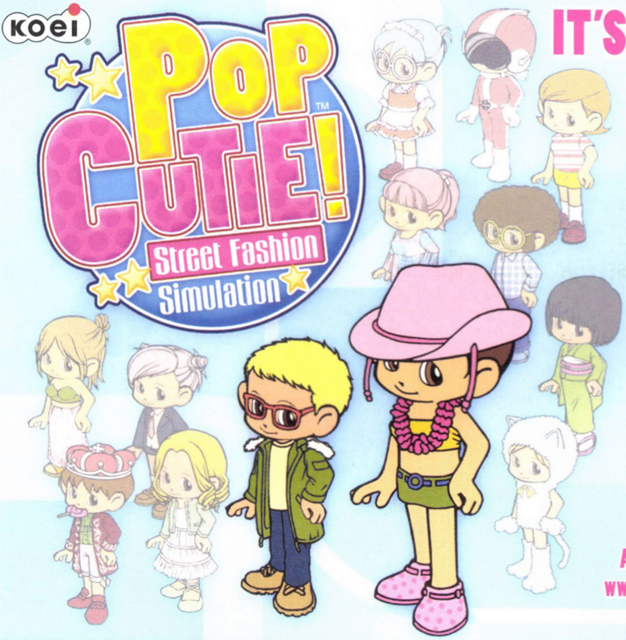
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Catherine
2 / 15
STAGE 1
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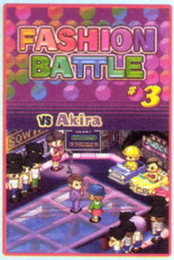
NOTEBOOK

I should check out the other shops in town.
I might pick up a keyword or two.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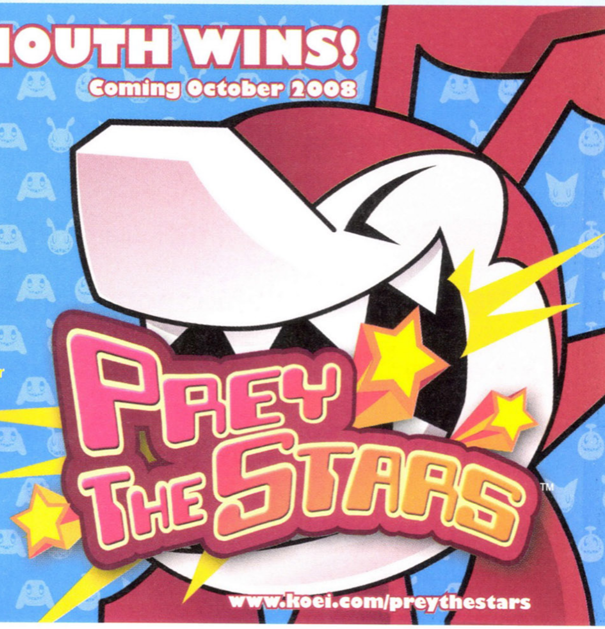
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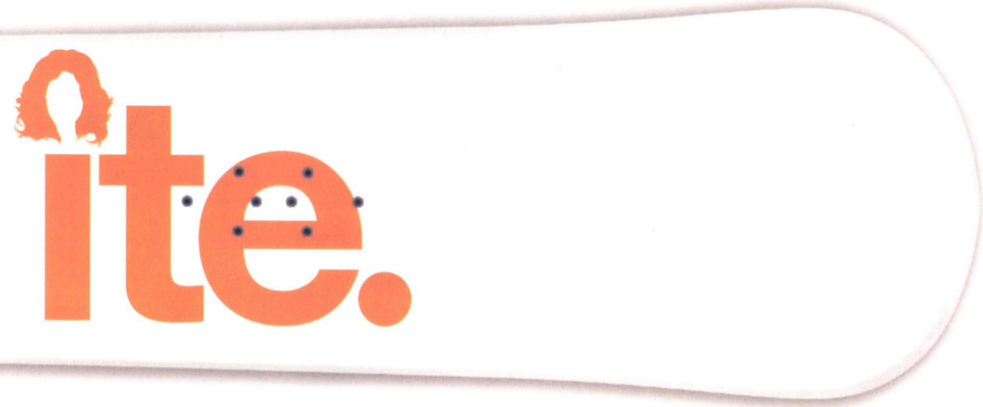
GAME OF E3 2008



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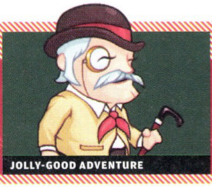
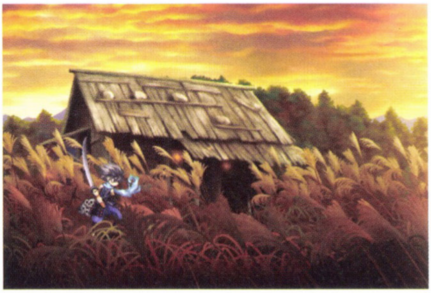

JOLLY-GOOD ADVENTURE

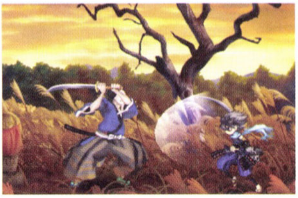
RYGAR LIVES!

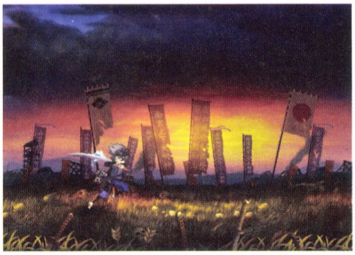
Killer Beauty

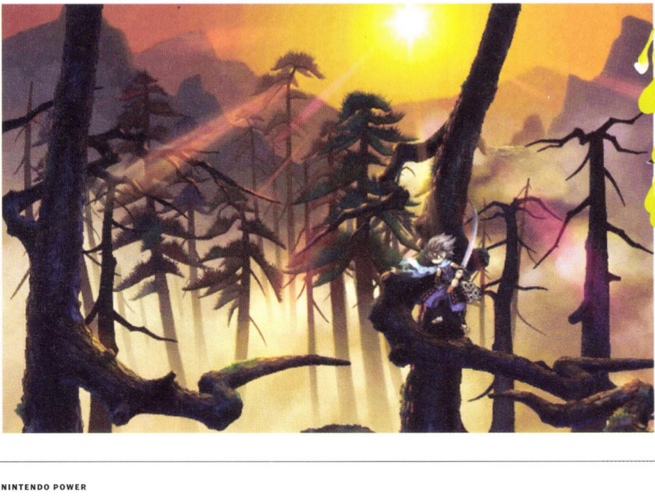
Feast your eyes on Muramasa: The Demon Blade, the latest hand-drawn tour de force from the acclaimed creators of Odin Sphere.

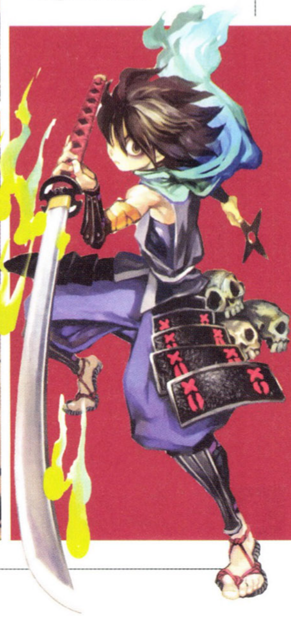


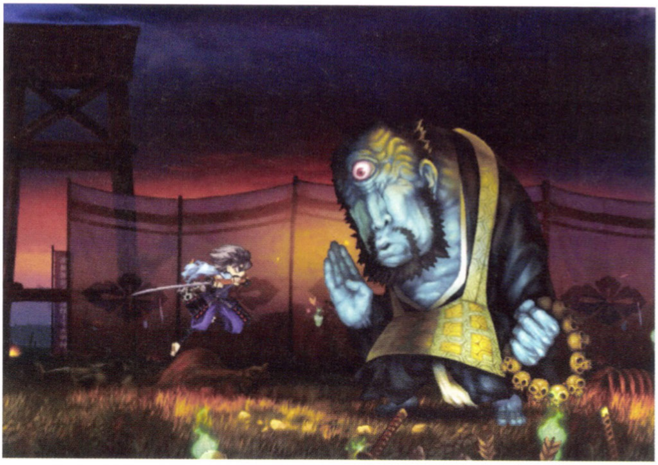
Stunning, isn't it? Originally announced in Japan more than a year ago, Vanillaware's Wii-exclusive action-RPG has finally resurfaced, and we're pleased to reveal that it's coming to North America next year under the name of Muramasa: The Demon Blade. Set to be published by XSEED Games, Muramasa is the spiritual successor to last year's surprise PlayStation 2 hit Odin Sphere. Whereas that game drew inspiration from Norse mythology, however, Muramasa borrows heavily from Japanese lore. It takes place during a fantastical version of the Genroku era, when Shogun Tsunayoshi Tokugawa's lust for power leads to widespread conflict over the Demon Blades. (The real Genroku period is considered a golden age for Japanese art, appropriately enough.) Though each of these


None of these images are concept art—the game actually looks like this.









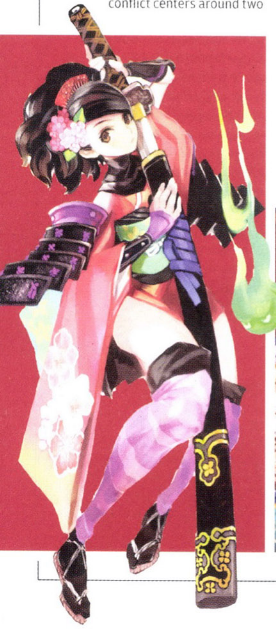
weapons possesses incredible power, it comes with a curse that drives the wielder to homicidal madness and condemns him to a tragic and untimely death. Drawn into the fighting are not only denizens of the netherworld, but mighty dragons and demon gods from throughout Japanese lore.

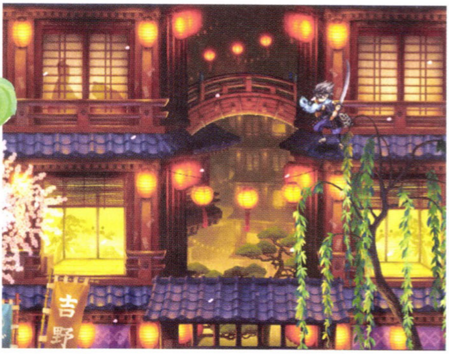
The player's entry into this conflict centers around two playable protagonists—a female, and a male who appears to carry the titular Muramasa. How our hero deals with the sword's curse is a mystery.

Unfortunately, so are many other aspects of the game at this point. We know that you'll use the Wii remote to emulate swinging a blade and throwing shuriken, and that many of the levels seem to involve much more vertical progression than did Odin Sphere's. The adventure's overall structure and how the RPG elements will be implemented are still unknown, though. Nevertheless, Muramasa's unparalleled visuals alone are enough to make it one of our most eagerly anticipated Wii titles.

Believe it or not, these screens don't even do the game justice. We recently had the opportunity to check out some brand-new footage, and what we saw puts even Odin Sphere to shame. One particularly jaw-dropping scene (not pictured here, unfortunately), in which the hero's tiny boat is tossed about by massive waves, looked like a feudal-Japanese painting come to life.

This year's holiday offerings may be a little lean, but with stuff like MadWorld, The House of the Dead: Overkill, and now Muramasa already on the horizon, serious Wii gamers have a lot to look forward to in 2009. And there's much more to come. Stay tuned. **—STEVE T.**

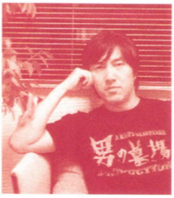


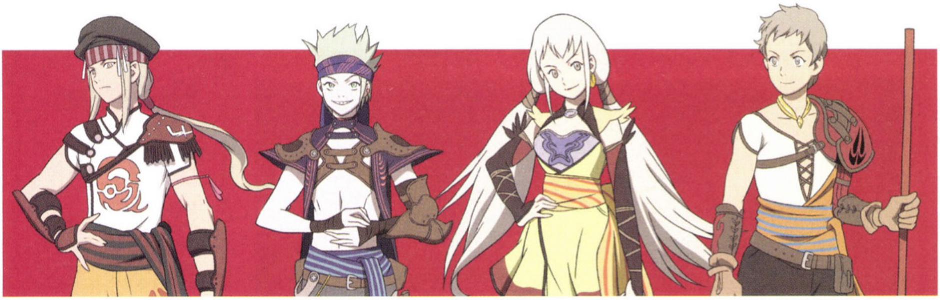


Electronic Arts Bets on 51

Ever since John Riccitiello returned to Electronic Arts as CEO last year, the mega-publisher has placed a much greater emphasis on producing original titles and working with some of the best outside development studios in the industry. The latest example of those efforts is the recent announcement that the company will publish an all-new horror-action game from director Goichi Suda—better known as Suda 51—and Grasshopper Manufacture (Killer 7, No More Heroes). Shinji Mikami (Resident Evil series) will serve as producer on the title, and Q Entertainment (Meteos, Lumines) will provide additional development. The as-of-yet-unnamed project will come to all major consoles, including Wii, sometime next year.

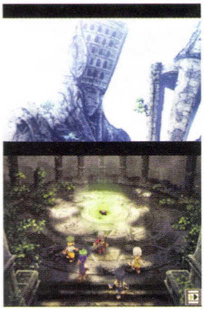
Mikami [above] and Suda [below] reflect on how awesome their game is going to be.





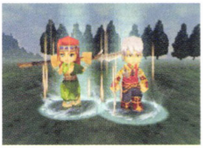
108 Reasons for RPG Fans to Rejoice

A fan-favorite role-playing series goes dual-screen and online in Konami's **Suikoden: Tierkreis**.



Though it may not have the name recognition of Final Fantasy or Dragon Quest, the Suikoden series has been enthralling RPG fans for more than a decade with its winning combination of compelling characters, captivating stories, accessible gameplay, and the unique hook of recruiting 108 individuals into your ragtag army. Konami recently announced that the next game in the series, Suikoden: Tierkreis, is coming exclusively to Nintendo DS, and it's bringing several intriguing new ideas to the tried-and-true Suikoden formula.

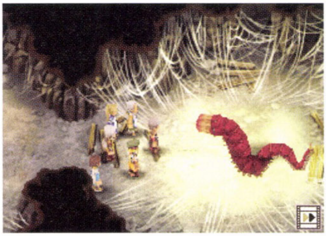
Suikoden: Tierkreis (the first handheld game in the series to come to North America) begins with the 108 Stars of Destiny battling the evil force known as the One King, an entity desiring chaos in the universe. Unfortunately, things don't go as planned and the 108 Stars are defeated; only four remain. Taking control of these remaining heroes, it's up to you to reunite the Stars of Destiny—which you'll do by using the power of resurrection. Though some of your fallen allies will return as warriors, others will be reborn as weapons, and others as benevolent beasts.



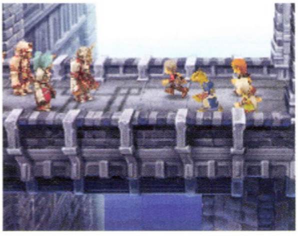
Another addition is a promising online component—a series first. Although there's no direct online play, you'll be able to send members of your party on quests with other players via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. As your character completes these quests, he or she will level up, gain new abilities, and find new items while fostering a sense of community between Suikoden players.

Naturally, Tierkreis (which means *zodiac* in German) features traditional fantasy role-playing as well, with turn-based battles featuring team-up special attacks—although parties consist of only four characters instead of the series' usual six—and an expansive world that will take you to multiple cities and countries, and even to parallel worlds. The game also boasts a rich visual presentation that combines 2-D and 3-D elements, topped off with anime-style cinema sequences. The developers aren't slouching in the audio department, either; the game will feature a generous amount of voiceover to help drive home its epic tale.

Although Konami hasn't committed to an exact release date as of press time, Suikoden's DS debut could arrive in North America as early as December. —**CHRIS H.**



If 104 of your friends had just been defeated, you'd be fighting mad, too.



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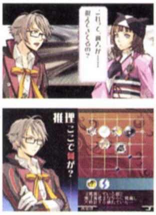
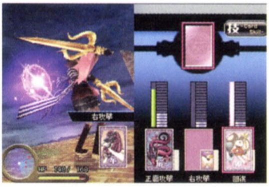
NEWS FROM JAPAN

Square Enix's DS Gamesplosion

At a pair of recent Japanese fan events, Square Enix showed two long-awaited DS games and announced plans for two more.



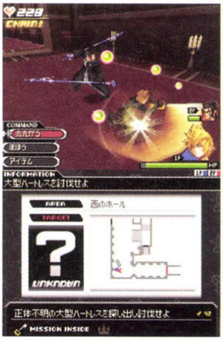


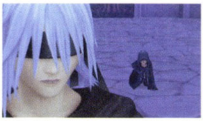
SIGMA HARMONICS

Rather than unveil their newest slate of titles before a jaded pack of journalists, the Japanese arm of Square Enix invited randomly selected members of their fan club to a private party where they could get hands-on time with several of the company's upcoming titles. Among the highlights was the curiously titled Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days, which tells the tale of protagonist Roxas's time in the villainous Organization XIII. (Series creator Tetsuya Nomura insists the title be read as "Three Five Eight Days over Two," and promises that it will make perfect sense by the end of the game.) In that title's story mode, players will control Roxas while the computer controls a rotating cast of NPC allies. As missions are completed, they're unlocked in multiplayer mode, where up to four players can take control of various Organization XIII members and team up to fight the heartless (still no word, alas, on whether or not the game will support Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection or be restricted to local wireless play). Player reports suggest that 358/2 Days has more of an action flavor than past Kingdom Hearts titles, and that you'll use the DS's Control Pad and buttons to move, jump, and attack, and the touch screen as a sort of touch-sensitive trackball that allows players to adjust the camera with their thumbs. Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days is currently scheduled for a winter release in Japan, but the title has not been officially announced for the US.

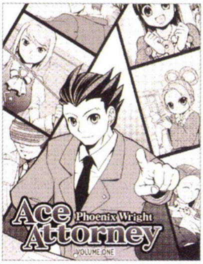
Square Enix also let their guests taste the weirdness of Sigma Harmonics, a mystery RPG in which a pair of alternate-reality Victorian sleuths must battle evil creatures who are attempting to change history, while also solving the murders caused by those creatures' vile machinations. Each chapter of the game involves a Phoenix Wright-style investigation, which you can end at any point when you're confident you've cracked the case. You then must justify your reasoning by using your accumulated clues to assemble a flowchart of collected evidence. The better your deductions, the easier it will be to beat that stage's boss—because the game also has a full RPG-style battle system in which you fight time-shifting fiends by playing cards, switching costumes, and changing the background battle music. And that's only scratching the surface of the strangeness! Considering how well it turned out when Square Enix decided to invent a new type of RPG with The World Ends With You, we're definitely crossing our fingers for a US release.

The final two DS titles were announced at an event set in a beta version of Square Enix's online Virtual World for PCs. The first was Cid and Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon: Maze of Time DS+, a DS version of the Wii game Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon, but with new jobs for the Chocobo and a second scenario for Cid. The second title was Chocobo and the Magic Storybook: The Witch, the Maiden, and the Five Heroes, a sequel to Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales. Neither game is currently scheduled for a US release, but considering both their predecessors made it to North Americans shores, there's a good chance that we too may be spending quality time with a flightless yellow bird in the very near future. **—CASEY L.**





KINGDOM HEARTS 358/2 DAYS



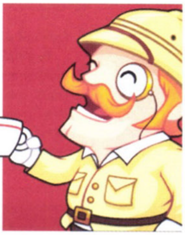
Read and Wright

Capcom's Phoenix rises again, this time in manga form.

In the most recent Ace Attorney DS game, players learned that Phoenix Wright was disgraced, disbarred, and stripped of his attorney's badge following a controversial case. But there's still plenty to be told about the spiky-haired lawyer's adventures prior to his fall from grace, and fans will be able to read all about them in the Phoenix Wright manga from Del Rey. The comedic stories contained within the 300-page volume focus on Phoenix and other faces from the Ace Attorney games (including Phoenix's assistant Maya Fey, his rival Miles Edgeworth, and prosecutors Franziska von Karma and Godot) both inside and outside the courtroom. You'll witness Phoenix solving murder cases, contemplating his relationships with other characters, putting kitty-cats on trial, and more—he even gets involved with supernatural shenanigans linked to cranky security guard Wendy Oldbag. Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Official Casebook Vol. 1 should arrive in bookstores near the end of September carrying a suggested price of $14.95. **—CHRIS H.**

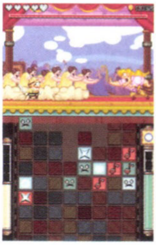
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Official Casebook, Volume One: The Phoenix Wright Files Copyright © 2006 by Capcom Co. Ltd.

Experimental Expedition

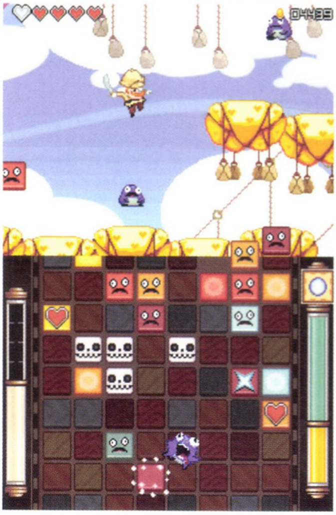


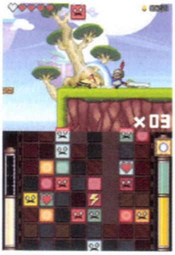
Don't think the puzzle and platforming genres can commingle in the same game? Poppycock! Meet **Henry Hatsworth and the Puzzling Adventure**.

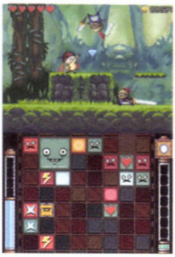
Best known as the longtime steward of the Madden NFL franchise, EA's Tiburon studio is getting a chance to test new waters with the refreshingly offbeat Henry Hatsworth and the Puzzling Adventure (tentative title). Coming to DS early next year, the game seamlessly blends 2-D platforming on the top screen with tile-based puzzle gameplay on the bottom. You can switch between the two at any time, and your actions on one screen affect the other. Whenever you vanquish an enemy on the top screen, for instance, his spirit floats down onto the puzzle board, where he becomes a tile. You must then align your foe with two like-colored pieces to eliminate him for good before he floats back to the upper screen and returns as a pesky ghost. Random power-ups also appear on the board, and clearing them can replenish Henry's health, enhance his arsenal of ranged and melee weapons, and provide other handy benefits. Removing tiles also charges your special meter, and once you've filled the requisite number of bars, our British explorer proclaims it to be tea time and hops into a giant mech suit equipped with a laser cannon. Naturally.

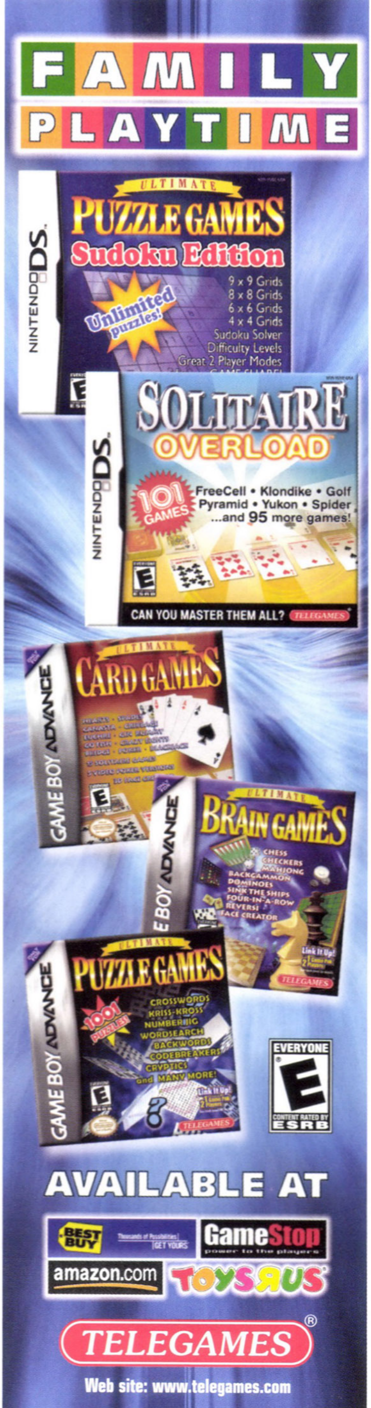


We've had only a brief glimpse of Henry Hatsworth and the Puzzling Adventure, but we like what we've seen. The game is brimming with personality, especially from Hatsworth himself. Plus, any hero who wears a monocle and possesses a mustache of such distinction is a right good chap in our book. Pip pip and tally ho! —**STEVE T.**





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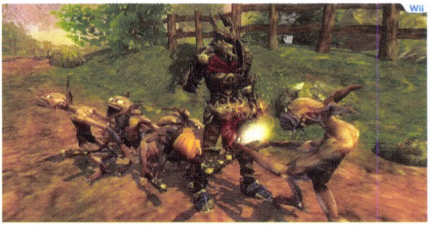
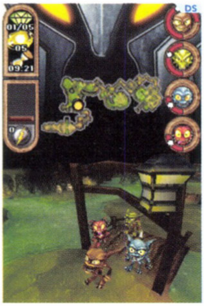
You Are the Overlord

The Wii gets its own dose of virtual evil.

Overlord was a surprise cult hit last year—Triumph Studios struck a chord with lots of gamers out there who liked having a chance to be the bad guy. It did well enough, in fact, that Wii is getting an Overlord all its own next year.

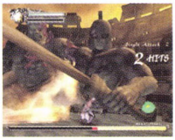


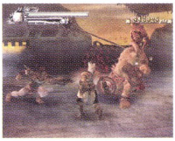
Overlord Dark Legend, in development at British studio Climax (makers of Silent Hill: Origins), marries the original game's concept to an all-new Wii remote-driven control interface. Once again you play the role of a fantasy villain, terrorizing the countryside from your towering fortress of evil, but this time you can pick up your monstrous minions and send them into battle with a quick point and flick of the controller. Rhianna Pratchett provides the game's story and snappy dialogue—she's married to fantasy legend Terry Pratchett, in addition to being an accomplished author in her own right—so expect to enjoy lots of laughs while you slaughter the heroes that storm the gates of your castle. A DS version, entitled Overlord Minions, is also in the works. **—DAVID S.**



Still Spinning

Hey, remember **Rygar: Battle of Argus**? This Wii remake of the PlayStation 2's excellent Rygar: The Legendary Adventure was announced more than a year ago then fell off the map completely. Well, Tecmo recently informed us that the game is still in development, and is on track for a North American release before the end of the year. We'll finally be getting our hands on the game shortly, so look for updated info and impressions next issue.





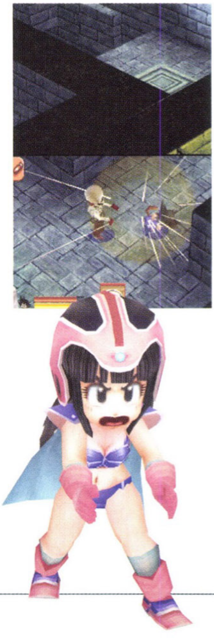
Dragon Ball: Hold the Z

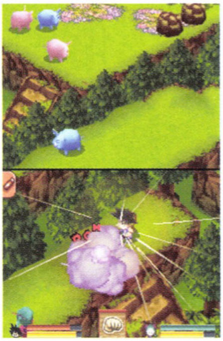
Starring young, silly Goku, not fat-Elvis Goku.

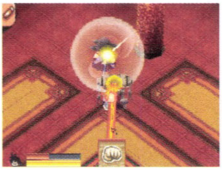
There's more to the Dragon Ball story than guys with big hair and improbably pointy feet punching each other. Before Dragon Ball Z made Goku world-famous, there was just plain Dragon Ball, the story of a precocious little kid with a tail and a talent for getting into trouble. Dragon Ball: Origins, coming soon to the DS, follows Goku through his younger years.

Developed by Game Republic, the studio founded by Capcom vet Yoshiki Okamoto, Origins features a touch-screen-only interface and plenty of the humor Dragon Ball creator Akira Toriyama's early comics are famous for. Genius gadgeteer Bulma shows up as Goku's AI-driven sidekick; when she's not cooking up inventions like her time machine and Dragon Radar, she offers a helping hand in combat and upgrades Goku's fighting staff.

A sneak peek at E3 revealed top-notch 3-D graphics, especially for a DS game, so even if you aren't a Dragon Ball die-hard, keep an eye out for this one when it hits shelves in November. **—DAVID S.**







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Wii

NINTENDO DS™

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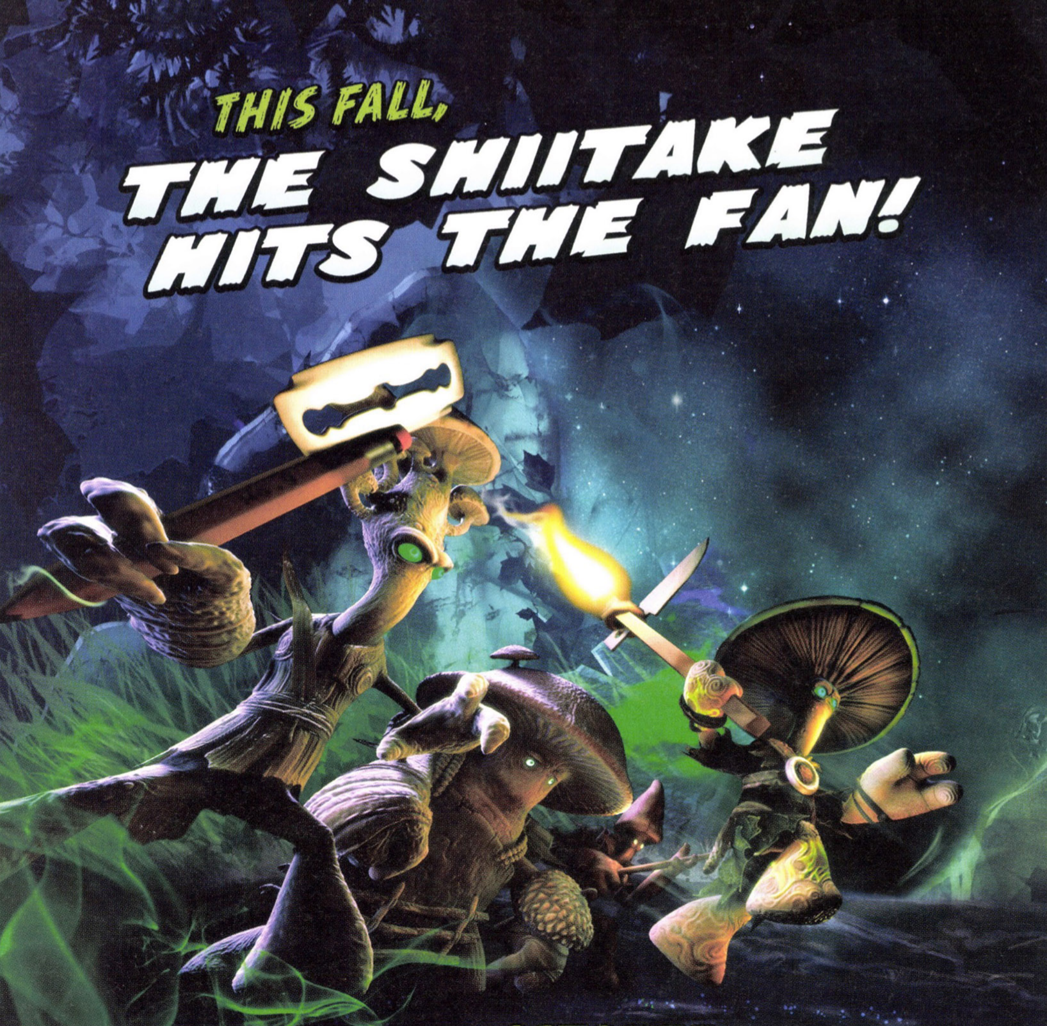
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GAME WATCH FORECAST

Wii

All Star Cheer Squad	THQ	10/08
Animal Crossing: City Folk	Nintendo	WIN 08
Bolt	Disney	11/08
Boogie Superstar	Electronic Arts	10/08
Brave: A Warrior's Tale	SouthPeak	TBA
Brothers in Arms: Double Time	Ubisoft	TBA
Call of Duty: World at War	Activision	11/08
Carnival Games Mini Golf	2K Play	10/08
Castlevania Judgment	Konami	11/08
Catch of the Day	Electronic Arts	TBA
Celebrity Sports Showdown	Electronic Arts	10/08
The Conduit	TBA	TBA
Cooking Mama World Kitchen	Majesco	10/08
Crash: Mind over Mutant	Sierra	10/08
Cursed Mountain	Deep Silver	2009
Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop	Capcom	WIN 08
Deal or No Deal	Destination	11/08
The Destiny of Zorro	Pronto Games	TBA
Disaster: Day of Crisis	Nintendo	TBA
Disney Sing It	Disney	10/08
Dokapon Kingdom	Atlus	10/08
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	Take-Two Interactive	3/09
Dragonology	Codemasters	10/08
FaceBreaker KO Party	Electronic Arts	11/08
FIFA 09 All-Play	Electronic Arts	10/08
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Crystal Bearers	Square Enix	TBA
Fishing Master World Tour	Hudson	2009
Game Party 2	Midway	10/08
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	TBA	2009
Goosebumps Horrorland	ELASTIC	10/08
Gravity	Deep Silver	10/08
The Guinness Book of World Records	Warner Bros.	10/08
Guitar Hero World Tour	Activision	10/08
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	11/08
Hasbro Family Game Night	Electronic Arts	11/08
High School Musical 3: Senior Year Dance	Disney	10/08
The House of the Dead: Overkill	Sega	2009
Indoor Sports	Konami	TBA
The King of Fighters Collection: The Orochi Saga	SNK Playmore	10/08
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	Activision	11/08
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	Sierra	10/08
Little King's Story	XSEED Games	12/08
Littlest Pet Shop	Electronic Arts	10/08
MadWorld	Sega	2009
Major Minor's Majestic March	Majesco	2009
Monster Lab	Eidos	10/08
Moto GP 08	Capcom	11/08
Muramasa: The Demon Blade	XSEED	2009
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	Gamecock	10/08
MySims Kingdom	Electronic Arts	10/08
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution 2	Tomy/ D3Publisher	10/08
NBA Live 09 All-Play	Electronic Arts	10/08
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	Capcom	11/08
NERF N-Strike	Electronic Arts	11/08
Onechanbara: Bikini Zombie Slayers	D3Publisher	Q1 09
Overlord Dark Legend	Codemasters	2009
Pet Pals: Animal Doctor	Majesco	10/08
Pirateology	Codemasters	TBA
PopStar Guitar	XS Games	10/08
Pro Bull Riding: Out of the Chute	Crave	10/08
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	2008
Quantum of Solace	Activision	11/08
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	Ubisoft	11/08
Rock Band 2	MTV Games	11/08
Rock Revolution	Konami	10/08
Rubik's World	The Game Factory	10/08
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Rune Factory Frontier	Marvelous Interactive	2009
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	Tecmo	12/08
Samurai Shodown Anthology	SNK Playmore	Q4 08
Secret Files: Tunguska	Deep Silver	FALL 08
Shaun White Snowboarding	Ubisoft	10/08
Sim Animals	Electronic Arts	2009
Six Flags Fun Park	Brash	10/08
Skate It	Electronic Arts	12/08
Sonic and the Black Knight	Sega	2009
Sonic Unleashed	Sega	11/08
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	Activision	10/08
SPRay	Tecmo	10/08
Spyborgs	Capcom	2009
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels	LucasArts	11/08
Story Hour Adventures	Zoo Games	2008
Story Hour Fairy Tales	Zoo Games	2008
TNA iMPACT!	Midway	10/08
Tomb Raider: Underworld	Eidos	11/08
Ultimate Band	Disney	11/08
Ultimate I Spy	Scholastic	10/08
We Cheer	Namco Bandai	10/08
Wii Music	Nintendo	WIN 08
Wii Sports Resort	Nintendo	SPR 09
Wizardology	Codemasters	12/08
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	THQ	11/08

NINTENDO DS

Age of Empires: Mythologies	THQ	11/08
All Star Cheer Squad	THQ	10/09
Avalon Code	Marvelous Interactive	Q1 09
Away: Shuffle Dungeon	Majesco	12/08
Bella Sara	Codemasters	10/08
Big Bang Mini	SouthPeak	Q4 08
Bleach: Dark Souls	Sega	10/08
Blood Bowl	Focus Home Interactive	2008
Bolt	Disney	11/08
Broken Sword	Ubisoft	2/09
Call of Duty: World at War	Activision	11/08
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	Konami	10/08
Catch of the Day	Electronic Arts	TBA
Cesar Millian's Dog Whisperer	Ubisoft	10/08
Chrono Trigger	Square Enix	12/08
Club Penguin: Elite Penguin Force	Disney	10/08
Cooking Guide: Can't Decide What to Eat?	Nintendo	11/08
Crash: Mind over Mutant	Sierra	10/08
de Blob	THQ	3/09
Disciples II	Strategy First	TBA
Disney Fairies: Tinker Bell	Disney	10/08
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	Take-Two Interactive	TBA
Doodle Hex	TBA	TBA
Dragon Ball: Origins	Atari	11/08
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	Square Enix	TBA
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Reverie	Square Enix	TBA
Dragonology	Codemasters	12/08
Drawn to Life: SpongeBob SquarePants Edition	THQ	9/08
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Chain Reaction	Deep Silver	2009
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Critical Mass	Deep Silver	2009
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Proving Grounds	Deep Silver	2009
Ener-G Dance Squad	Ubisoft	10/08
Ener-G Gym Rockets	Ubisoft	10/08
Ener-G Horse Riders	Ubisoft	10/08
Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero	Konami	11/08
Exit DS	Taito	10/08
Gauntlet	Eidos	10/08
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	TBA	2009
Goosebumps Horrorland	ELASTIC	10/08
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	Rockstar	WIN 08
Gravity	Deep Silver	TBA
The Guinness Book of World Records	Warner Bros.	10/08
Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades	Activision	11/08
Henry Hatsworth and the Puzzling Adventure	Electronic Arts	2009
High School Musical 3: Senior Year	Disney	10/08
The Humans	Deep Silver	TBA
Imagine Babysitters	Ubisoft	10/08
Imagine Fashion Designer New York	Ubisoft	10/08
Imagine Movie Star	Ubisoft	2008
Imagine Wedding Designer	Ubisoft	10/08
Infinite Space	Sega	2009
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	Activision	11/08
Last King of Africa	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	Sierra	10/08
Littlest Pet Shop: Garden	Electronic Arts	10/08
Littlest Pet Shop: Jungle	Electronic Arts	10/08
Littlest Pet Shop: Winter	Electronic Arts	10/08
Luminous Arc 2	Atlus	11/08
Master of the Monster Lair	Atlus	10/08
Metal Slug 7	SNK Playmore	11/08
Monsters Racers	Koei	2009
Moon	Mastiff	11/08
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	Gamecock Media Group	10/08
MySims Kingdom	Electronic Arts	10/08
National Geographic Panda	Namco Bandai	11/08
NERF N-Strike	Electronic Arts	11/08
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	Capcom	11/08
Ninjatown	SouthPeak Interactive	10/08
Overlord Minions	Codemasters	2009
Peggle	PopCap	2008
Pet Vet Down Under	Deep Silver	TBA
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Pirateology	Codemasters	TBA
Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia	Nintendo	11/08
Populous DS	XSEED	10/08
Prey the Stars	Koei	10/08
Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	Ubisoft	11/08
Princess on Ice	Aksys	WIN 08
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	2008
Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	D3Publisher	10/08
Quantum of Solace	Activision	11/08
Rhythm Heaven	Nintendo	TBA
Robocalypse	Tecmo	10/08
Rock Revolution	Konami	10/08
Rubik's World	The Game Factory	10/08
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Secret Files: Tunguska	Deep Silver	FALL 08
Sim Animals	Electronic Arts	2009
Six Flags Fun Park	Brash	10/08
Skate It	Electronic Arts	12/08
Spectrobes: Beyond the Portals	Disney Interactive	10/08
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	Activision	10/08
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance	LucasArts	11/08
Suikoden: Tierkreis	Konami	12/08
Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff	Tecmo	11/08
Theresia	Aksys	10/08
Tom Clancy's EndWar	Ubisoft	10/08
Tony Hawk's Motion/ Hue Pixel Painter	Activision	11/08
TrackMania DS	Focus Home Interactive	Q4 08
Transformers Animated: The Game	Activision	10/08
Ultimate Band	Disney	11/08
Warlords DS	Strategy First	TBA
What's Cooking? Jamie Oliver	Atari	10/08
A Witch's Tale	NIS America	10/08
Wizardology	Codemasters	12/08
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	THQ	11/08
Zenses: Ocean	The Game Factory	10/08
Zenses: Rainforest	The Game Factory	10/08
Zoo Vet: Endangered Species	Legacy	10/08

RED TEXT = TITLES ADDED THIS MONTH •TENTATIVE TITLE NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE

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Wii Gets Served

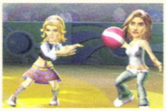
EA puts plans in motion for new tennis franchise.

Electronic Arts is the first third-party publisher to announce support for the upcoming Wii MotionPlus accessory with an all-new (as-of-yet-untitled) tennis game under development at EA Canada. Details remain scarce for the 2009 release, but the publisher boasts that you'll be able to play as the sport's greatest competitors from both the past and present.

Speed Demons

Catch and race 'em all in Monster Racers for DS.

You're familiar with the formula—travel the world and catch wild creatures—but Koei's Monster Racers tries something a little different. Yes, you face off against other varmints, but as the title suggests, you race against other monsters instead of fighting them.



Seeing Stars

Compete with celebrities in EA's latest Wii offering.

Ever wanted to teach Avril Lavigne, Nelly Furtado, or Sugar Ray Leonard a lesson? In Celebrity Sports Showdown for Wii, you can—you'll face them and seven other musicians and athletes in 12 sporting events (such as canoeing, jousting, and inner-tubing) this holiday season.

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Wii Channels

Strong Bad is leading a WiiWare revolution, and we've got the story on what he's up to next. Plus: a Mega Man 9 update, Hudson's latest WiiWare revivals, and more!

In This Section

WIIWARE PREVIEW
Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People Episodes 2 & 3

WIIWARE FEATURE
Mega Man 9 Boss Blowout

WIIWARE PREVIEW
Alien Crush Returns

WIIWARE PREVIEW
Bomberman Blast

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WIIWARE GAMES

- HELIX
- MIDNIGHT POOL
- STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE EPISODE 1: HOMESTAR RUINER
- WILD WEST GUNS

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VIRTUAL CONSOLE GAMES

- BREAK IN
- MEGA MAN
- NEO TURF MASTERS
- SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
- SAMURAI SHODOWN II
- SPLATTERHOUSE 2
- STAR PARODIER
- YS BOOK I & II

Still Going Strong

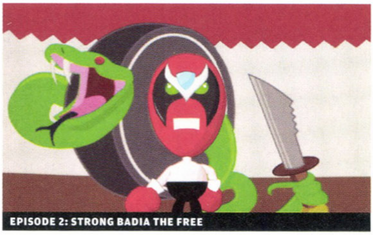
Get the awesome details on the upcoming chapters of **Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People.**

If you've already downloaded the first WiiWare episode of Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People, then you know what it means to try to handle Strong Bad's style. It means interacting with bizarre characters such as local athlete Homestar Runner, Homestar's hippie girlfriend Marzipan, and Strong Bad's brothers Strong Sad (the wussy one) and Strong Mad (the musclebound oaf); it means solving item-oriented puzzles such as using a hedge trimmer to chop off a parade float's head so you can wear it as a mask; and it means living life the Strong Bad way by answering email, playing retro-style video games, and insulting anything you don't consider certifiably awesome.

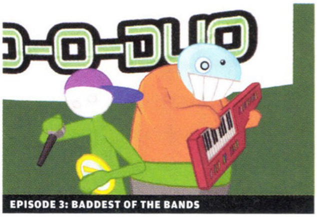
So what's next for the boxing-glove-wearing, lucha-libre-masked antihero? You shouldn't expect any significant gameplay changes in upcoming episodes, but you can look forward to more weird situations and an abundance of humor. In Episode 2: Strong Badia the Free (which may be available by the time you read this), Strong Bad is placed under house arrest by The King of Town for failing to pay the king's new tax of one delicious snack cake per email, which causes Strong Bad to secede from Free Country USA and form his own nation of Strong Badia. His neighbors, however, follow suit, forcing Strong Bad to unify them, one by one, to stand up to the king. In addition, you'll get to engage in side activities like Math Kickers, an edutainment/beat-'em-up minigame.

Episode 3: Baddest of the Bands kicks off when Strong Bad's beloved game console—the Videlectrix Fun Machine—melts down while he's playing Limozeen's Hot Babelien Odyssey (a side-scrolling action game featuring Strong Bad's favorite band). When Strong Bad discovers that he doesn't have the money to get it repaired, he does the only sensible thing: he arranges a "battle of the bands" competition to earn some cash, which involves creating a totally rad album cover to secure the Limozeen band members as judges, then reuniting the local bands so the contest can take place. You'll also have to sabotage the opposition to have any chance of success since Strong Bad's band is the kind that makes your ears bleed (although it does have an awesome name; options include Devastating Oyster Itch Machine and Diamond Omelet Incorporated). Along the way, you'll get to visit new locations—such as the massive concert stage—and explore new areas of previously seen environments, including Strong Mad's room and the interior of Marzipan's house.

And Strong Bad's adventures are only getting started—beyond Strong Badia the Free and Baddest of the Bands, publisher/developer Telltale Games has two additional chapters lined up for WiiWare in the coming months. **—CHRIS H.**

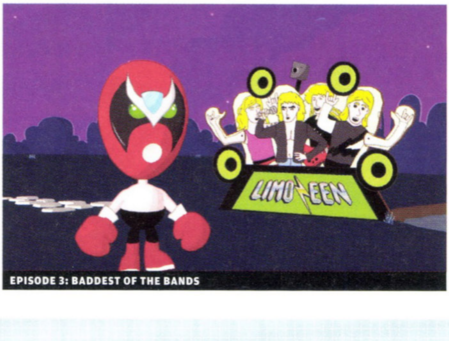


EPISODE 2: STRONG BADIA THE FREE



EPISODE 3: BADDEST OF THE BANDS

Everybody gets in on the musical action in Baddest of the Bands. Coach Z's on the mic, Bub is on keytar—and Strong Bad's gonna sabotage them both.



EPISODE 3: BADDEST OF THE BANDS

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Wii

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Cross the Boss

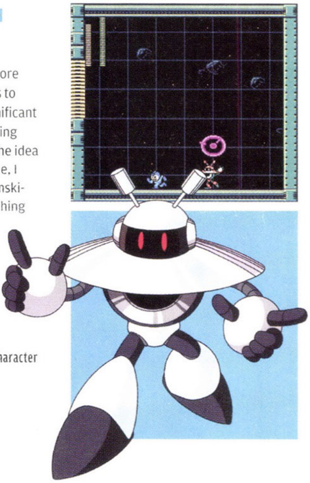
We go behind the scenes with the crew responsible for the deadly Robot Master bosses of Mega Man 9.

Longtime Blue Bomber aficionados are already very familiar with how the classic Mega Man formula works: you choose your stage, you fight your way to the end, and then you face off against a challenging, dangerous Robot Master boss. If you're skilled, smart, and lucky, you'll defeat the Robot Master and win his special weapon; if not, it's back to the beginning of the level for you. Mega Man 9 for WiiWare is no different, and it adds eight all-new Robot Masters to the Mega Man mythos. Although Capcom let us reveal the Robot Masters' names back in Vol. 231, they've been secretive about the bosses' appearances and details until recently. To find out more about these masters of mayhem (and the stages in which they reside), we went to character designer Yoshitaka Hatakeyama and chief background designer Hidetoshi Minamata (both from developer Inti Creates), who provided us with inside info on Mega Man 9's villainous cast. —**CHRIS H.**

GALAXY MAN

Weapon: Black Hole Bomb
Stage: Space Lab

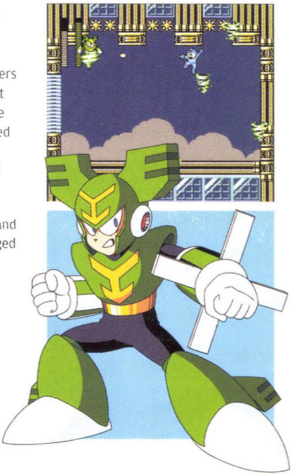
"This was one of the more difficult Robot Masters to visualize. I spent a significant amount of time agonizing over how to visualize the idea of 'galaxy.' After a while, I came up with the Adamski-type UFO motif. Everything fell into place for Galaxy Man after that. Honestly, Galaxy Man is my favorite Robot Master out of the new roster I created."
—Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, character designer



TORNADO MAN

Weapon: Tornado Blow
Stage: Sky

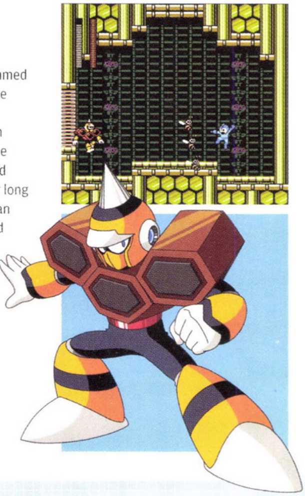
"Almost all the Robot Masters in the Mega Man series that have had wind themes have sported propellers, so I tried to keep in line with that tradition, but I also wanted to express that in my own unique way. I did this by placing wings on his head and giving him arms that changed into propellers."
—Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, character designer



HORNET MAN

Weapon: Hornet Chaser
Stage: Flower Park

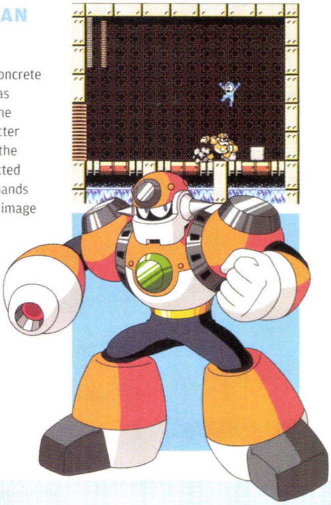
"Hornet Man can be summed up in a single phrase: Bee Nest Robot. There's no twist to him. Hornet Man was originally going to be a female character called Honey Woman, but after long consideration, the woman boss status was awarded to Splash Woman instead."
—Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, character designer



CONCRETE MAN

Weapon: Concrete Shot
Stage: Forest

"This character uses concrete as his weapon. That was seriously difficult for me to visualize as a character in line with the rest of the Mega Man cast. I depicted extraordinarily large hands and feet to convey the image of a concrete-mixer truck."
—Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, character designer

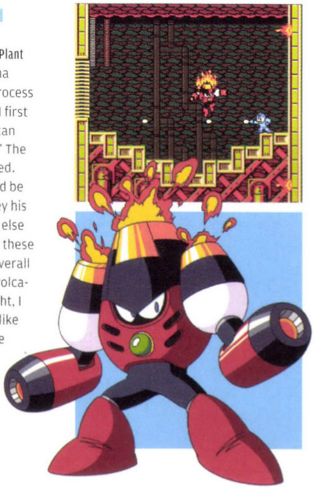


MAGMA MAN

Weapon: Magma Bazooka
Stage: Geothermal Power Plant

"Brainstorming Magma Man and the design process went fairly smoothly. I first thought, 'What color can you relate to magma?' The answer was simple—red. Next, his design should be like Air Man's to convey his firepower. Everything else followed after I nailed these concepts down. The overall motif of his design is volcanoes. Later, in hindsight, I noticed he looks a lot like Needle Man, but I have kept that to myself [laughs]."

–Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, character designer

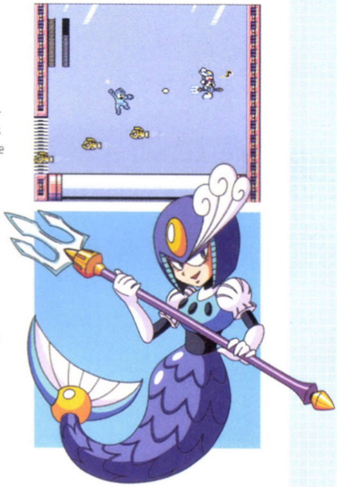


SPLASH WOMAN

Weapon: Laser Trident
Stage: Ocean

"We wanted to differentiate this water-based stage from other games that have water-based levels. One of the ways we did this was to incorporate light reflecting on the water throughout the stage. The light represents the ocean waves. We also had planned to have intricate coral reefs and sinking ships in the foreground and background but we decided to take them out since those elements would detract from the old-school game-design themes."

–Hidetoshi Minamata, chief background designer

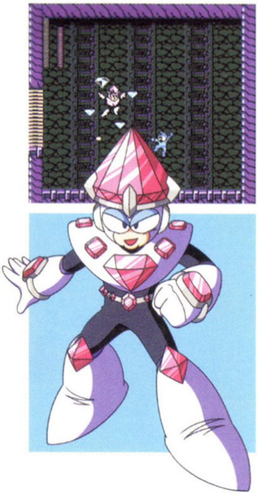


JEWEL MAN

Weapon: Jewel Satellite
Stage: Mine

"I was inspired to create the tackiest Mega Man character possible. I wanted him to be decorated in gaudy stones and to be the most tasteless Robot Master character in the Mega Man universe. Originally, Jewel Man was supposed to have overly elaborate and peculiar movement patterns and attacks that would throw the player off, but we decided to drop the idea because it made him extremely difficult to combat."

–Yoshitaka Hatakeyama, character designer

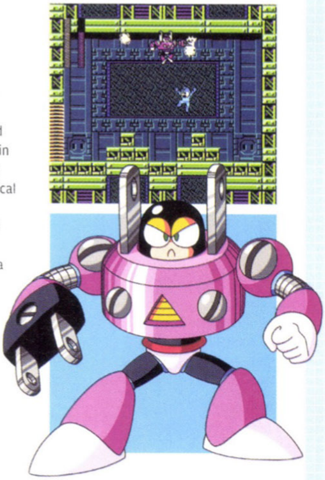


PLUG MAN

Weapon: Plug Ball
Stage: Factory

"Plug Man's stage has a factory and electric-plant theme. We initially had conveyer belts, scales, and sand tornadoes displayed in the background space. We also decided to add electrical sockets throughout the stage that Plug Man would theoretically recharge his energy from. The plug idea actually came to me during the final stages of the game's design-development period. I'm very happy that the stage image works well with Plug Man's theme."

–Hidetoshi Minamata, chief background designer



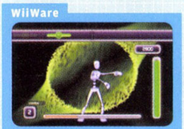
MEGA MERCHANDISING

Even though Mega Man 9 is a downloadable game, it's getting more heavily promoted than many retail releases. In Japan (where the title is known as Rockman 9), Capcom is releasing two music CDs based on the game: an original soundtrack and an arranged soundtrack. They've also licensed a Japanese energy drink that's designed to look like the life-replenishing E-Tanks from the Mega Man series. The marketing slogan is, "Drink before you get attacked!"

CAPCOM
ROCKMAN 9

DOWNLOAD STATION

WiiWare



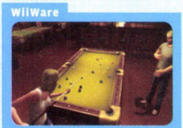
HELIX

PUBLISHER: GHOSTFIRE GAMES
GENRE: RHYTHM
Wii POINTS: 1,000

If you're into techno, you'll probably get into Helix's groove. It's got a ton of tracks, the dual-remote dance moves work pretty well (although the game sometimes registers gestures even when you don't do them properly), and three difficulty levels add accessibility. Of course, if you don't like techno, you're out of luck as far as the music selection goes, and the game is lacking when it comes to modes and structure. —**CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

WiiWare



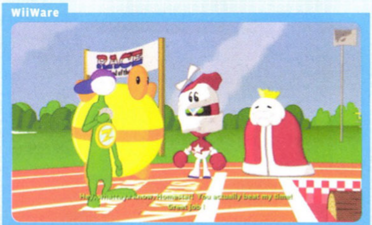
MIDNIGHT POOL

PUBLISHER: GAMELOFT
GENRE: SPORTS
Wii POINTS: 800

Midnight Pool's Wii remote-as-pool-cue controls are not as refined as those of Wii Play's pool section. It takes practice to find a middle ground between strong and weak shots. Setting up shots is easy, though, thanks to helpful guidelines. By beating pool-hall patrons in games of 8-Ball (two types) or 9-Ball you earn cash and advance through Story mode. Detailed graphics provide eye candy, and trick-shot challenges add variety. —**GEORGE S.**

Recommended

WiiWare



STRONG BAD EPISODE 1: HOMESTAR RUINER

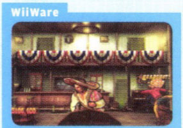
PUBLISHER: TELLTALE GAMES • GENRE: ADVENTURE
Wii POINTS: 1,000

Chris H's Pick

The first installment of Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People doesn't break a lot of new ground when it comes to point-and-click adventures, but it is funny—and fun. While the developers have stuck to the tried-and-true find-item-solve-puzzle formula for the gameplay, it's the quirky characters, bizarre sense of humor, and goofy situations that make the game worth playing, even if you're not familiar with the source material. There are a few obtuse clues and the interface is a little rough around the edges, but Homestar Ruiner is worth your Wii Points.

Recommended

WiiWare



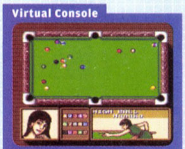
WILD WEST GUNS

PUBLISHER: GAMELOFT
GENRE: SHOOTER
Wii POINTS: 1,000

This is what I like to see on WiiWare—a quality original game that takes advantage of Wii's capabilities yet wouldn't make sense as a retail release. There's nothing complex about Wild West Guns' shooting-gallery-style action (you have infinite ammo), and it's fairly short, but it looks good, offers some decent mission variety, and makes good use of the underutilized Zapper peripheral. At 1,000 Wii Points, it gives plenty of bang for your buck. —**CHRIS H.**

Recommended

Virtual Console



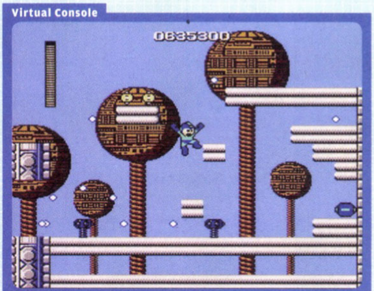
BREAK IN

PLATFORM: TURBOGRAFX16
PUBLISHER: NAXAT SOFT
GENRE: SPORTS
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1989

Not suffering from a lack of options, import Break In gives us six billiard games ranging from the obvious to the obscure, and three modes. The full table is on view at all times, making the balls small and difficult to identify, but if you employ a coach, he or she will not only point you to your next best target, but will line up the aiming Image Ball for the shot. It's so easy, it feels like cheating. —**GEORGE S.**

Hmmm...

Virtual Console



MEGA MAN

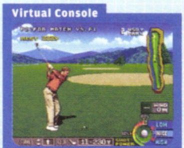
PLATFORM: NES • PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
GENRE: ACTION • ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1987

Chris H's Pick

Mega Man has received more series and makeovers than just about any character in video gaming, but this is the one that started it all—and it's still one of the best. The ability to steal enemy weapons and tackle stages in the desired order is still brilliant, and the soundtrack impresses more than 20 years after its original release. The Virtual Console's ability to save your progress at any time is a nice benefit, too. Mega Man's a must-have classic.

Recommended

Virtual Console



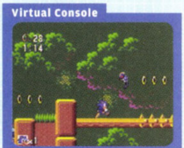
NEO TURF MASTERS

PLATFORM: NEOGEO
PUBLISHER: D4/SNK
GENRE: SPORTS
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1996

With easy-to-grasp controls, great visuals for its time, and a decent selection of courses and golfers, Neo Turf Masters offers an excellent game of arcade-style golf. In fact, it might be my favorite golf game ever. So why can't I fully recommend it? Because it was just released as part of SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1 (also on Wii), which is a much better value for your money. —**CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

Virtual Console



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

PLATFORM: MASTER SYSTEM
PUBLISHER: SEGA
GENRE: PLATFORMER
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1991

As you might expect, the 8-bit version of Sonic the Hedgehog doesn't stack up well to the Genesis original. Frequent slowdown and flicker hamper the Blue Blur's trademark speed, and the level designs are much more simplistic than their 16-bit counterparts. As a historical curiosity, though, the game probably has value for hardcore fans. —**STEVE T.**

Hmmm...

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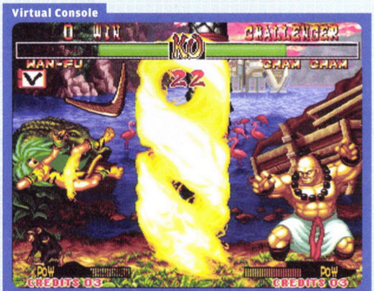
DOWNLOAD STATION

Virtual Console



SAMURAI SHODOWN II

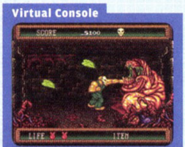
PLATFORM: NEOGEO • PUBLISHER: D4/SNK
GENRE: FIGHTING • ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1994

Justin C's Pick

Improving on the original by adding new characters and new moves such as ducking and parrying, Samurai Shodown II is an amazingly deep and highly enjoyable 2-D fighting game. Newbies can pick it up and start playing (perhaps at a lower difficulty level since the AI can be pretty challenging at the outset) while veterans can try to master the game's intricacies. It's easily one of SNK's best, and I think it's one of the best games ever made, period.

Recommended

Virtual Console



SPLATTER-HOUSE 2

PLATFORM: GENESIS
PUBLISHER: NAMCO
GENRE: ACTION
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1992

The man with the Jason Voorhees-esque mask is back, smacking down every grotesque monster in his path in this M-rated side-scroller. Splatterhouse 2 is as fun as the original since the game is basically the same, but because it's the same, I recommend buying it only if you're a die-hard fan of the series. Everyone else might want to wait for the third iteration. **—JUSTIN C.**

Hmmm...

WANTED!

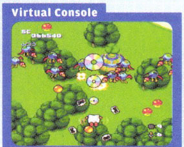
We're still tallying up the reader votes for most-wanted Genesis games, and while we'll have the results next issue, here are the NP staff picks to tide you over.

NP STAFF'S MOST WANTED: SEGA GENESIS

1. Mega Man: The Wily Wars (Europe & Japan)
2. Phantasy Star IV: The End of the Millennium
3. The Revenge of Shinobi
4. Sonic & Knuckles
5. Shining Force II

For the following issue, we'll focus on Super NES, so send us your top five picks to **vcpoll@nintendopower.com**. Note: This is for polling purposes only and will in no way determine future Virtual Console releases.

Virtual Console



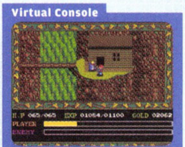
STAR PARODIER

PLATFORM: TURBOGRAFX16
PUBLISHER: HUDSON
GENRE: SHOOTER
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1992

Shooter fans have lots of options on Virtual Console, but few are as lively or lighthearted as Star Parodier (which was never previously released in the US). Where else can you take control of a flying PC Engine and blast enemies with CDs? The music and pastel graphics impress, and the low difficulty curve makes this game ideal for shooter newbies or genre fans looking for something different. **—CHRIS H.**

Recommended

Virtual Console

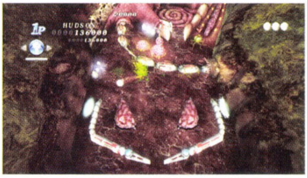


YS BOOK I & II

PLATFORM: TURBOGRAFX16
PUBLISHER: NIHON FALCOM/HUDSON
GENRE: ADVENTURE
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1990

I always wanted to play Ys as a kid, but I never had access to a Turbo CD. Now that I've finally got my hands on the game, the bloom is off the rose, unfortunately. The storytelling is extremely primitive by today's standards, as is the combat, which consists of simply running into your foes. That CD-quality soundtrack is still pretty fantastic, though. **—STEVE T.**

Hmmm...



Crush Groove

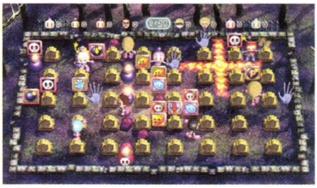
Hudson's pinball classic Alien Crush is reborn with a new WiiWare installment.

With TurboGrafx16 titles Alien Crush and sequel Devil's Crush already available as Virtual Console releases, Hudson is rolling out a new creature-slamming pinball title featuring contemporary graphics, four-player simultaneous matches online, and motion-based control. Alien Crush Returns puts you on an infested space station, armed with action balls that give you powered-up alien-crushing abilities: Boost, Reverse, and Split. Hudson is planning for additional action balls as downloadable content, along with more stages. Once you've mastered wiping out the game's hordes and three enormous boss monsters, you may be ready to post your top scores on the online leaderboard.

Total Bomber

Prolific Bomberman continues to have a blast with a new WiiWare title.

Since his US debut in 1987, Bomberman has appeared in more than 60 iterations of his multiplayer-friendly blast-a-thon, which allows participants to hit each other with increasingly powerful explosives. Bomberman Blast accommodates up to eight players online, with as many as four playing on the same console. Once you've plowed your way through each of the game's 10 arenas, you'll be able to trade in your Bomberman character for a Mii. Three new power-ups help you achieve victory, including Shield, which blocks others' blasts as long as you keep shaking your Wii remote.



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THIS MONTH IN PREVIEWS

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Making Magic

> HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE

PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS** • DEVELOPER: **EA BRIGHT LIGHT** • RELEASE: **TBD**

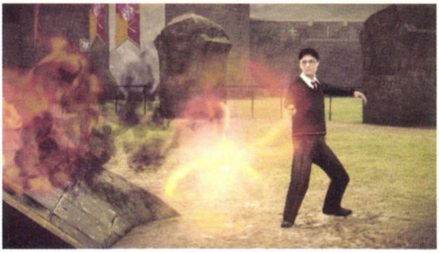
Harry Potter's latest theatrical adventures may have been delayed by several months, but that's not stopping the folks at EA from bringing Harry's sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to Wii and DS.

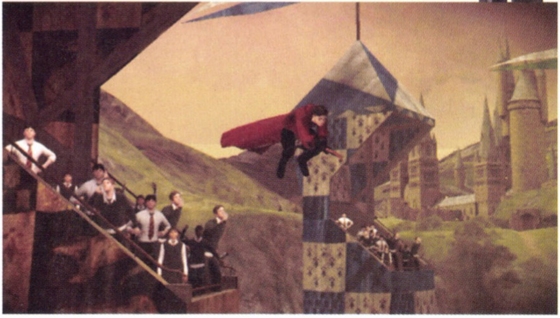
Like last year's Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, the Wii version of Half-Blood Prince lets you control Harry himself in a fully realized re-creation of Hogwarts. Though much of the school's layout will be familiar to Phoenix players, there are new areas to explore, such as expanded herbology greenhouses, the Quidditch Gate, and the Astrology Tower. By waving the Wii remote like a wand, you can interact with the castle as you explore its grounds to reveal collectible tokens, plus you can use gesture-based spells such as Wingardium Leviosa (for moving objects), Incendio (for setting things on fire), and Reparo (for repairing broken objects) to accomplish specific tasks.

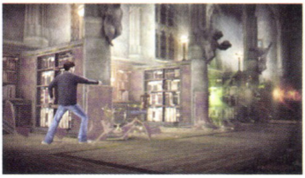
Simply discovering Hogwarts' secrets, however, is only part of the experience. The game also focuses on story-driven missions involving three distinct disciplines: dueling, potions, and Quidditch. Whether you're squaring off against other students in dueling clubs or facing villains such as Bellatrix Lestrange at critical plot points, you move with the Control Stick, dodge with the A Button, and flick the remote to fire basic Stupefy spells. You unleash advanced spells with more-complex motions of the remote and nunchuk—flick them both up to leave your opponent dangling helplessly with Levicorpus, for example.

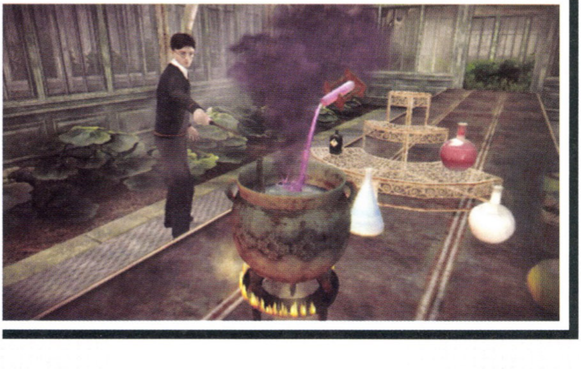
Potions play a big part in the game as well, as Harry acquires a journal written by the titular prince, which bolsters his potion-making skills. The Wii controls let you concoct potions in a variety of ways: you shake the remote and nunchuk to fan flames, twist the remote to pour various flasks of liquid, and drag and drop ingredients such as caterpillars, leeches, and rat spleens. As for Quidditch, complexity is kept to a minimum—you simply point the remote at the screen to guide Harry through a series of gates that help him gain speed to catch the Golden Snitch and win the sporting contest.

In addition, a DS version of Half-Blood Prince is on the way, featuring plentiful touch-screen minigames and an emphasis on collecting items. —CHRIS H.









Ranger Redux

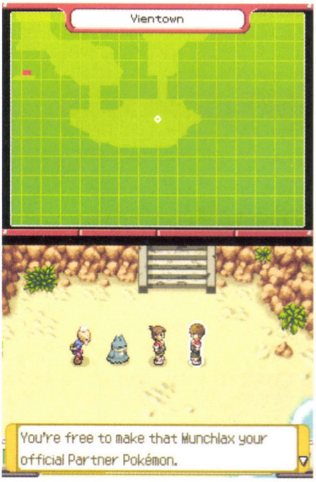
> POKÉMON RANGER: SHADOWS OF ALMIA

PLATFORM: DS • **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: CREATURES • **RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 2008

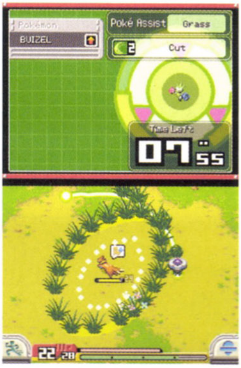
We recently had the good fortune to get our hands on the final North American version of Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia for Nintendo DS, the second game in the Pokémon Ranger series, and although the adventure is packed with newsworthy gameplay, story, and tactical elements, this month we're focusing on two big improvements over the first game. Next month we'll bring you full feature coverage as we begin our exploration of the Almia region.

The first notable advance since the original Ranger game is a significant change to the Capture Styler mechanics. In the first Pokémon Ranger, you had to keep the stylus pressed to the touch screen at all times while drawing capture lines around a Pokémon, at least until the orange number appeared to signal a successful capture. If you lifted the stylus, you had to start over, and that made for some frustrating situations for players, particularly on difficult captures that required drawing more than just a few circles. In Shadows of Almia, however, you can lift the stylus off the touch screen then replace it and continue encircling a Pokémon to complete your capture. You still have to be fast and accurate with the stylus, but you aren't penalized for a momentary lapse in concentration, and the result is a more natural feel to the entire Capture Styler process. During tough captures when wild Pokémon throw a lot of attacks at you, you'll be thankful for this change.

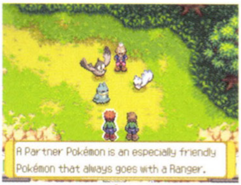
The second big improvement is the newly added ability to call on a variety of Partner Pokémon. In the first adventure you were joined by your one and only Partner Pokémon early in the game, and from that point on if you wanted a Poké Assist, you had a choice of using either that one Pokémon's move or that of a captured Pokémon on your team. In Shadows of Almia you can add up to 17 Partner Pokémon (Chimchar, Cranidos, Croagunk, Gible, Hippopotas, Kricketot, Machop, Mime Jr., Misdreavus, Munchlax, Pachirisu, Piplup, Shieldon, Sneasel, Snover, Starly, and Turtwig)—one Pokémon representing each type—and although you can choose only one of them to be your Partner at any given time, having your choice of 17 Pokémon and their moves gives you a big tactical advantage when you require a Partner's help. The help from this group of Partners also gives the game an additional challenge since many of the Partner Pokémon are not easily found. From what we've seen so far, Pokémon fans have a lot to look forward to in Shadows of Almia. **—SCOTT P.**



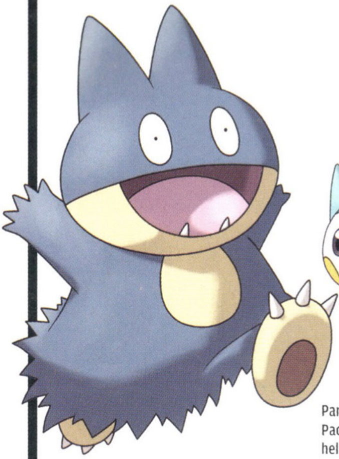
You're free to make that Munchlax your official Partner Pokémon.

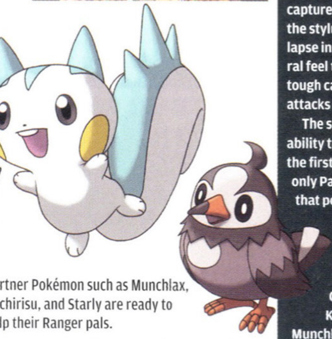


Poké Assists make the process of capturing wild Pokémon easier for you. Roselia's Grass-type Poké Assist creates a wall that blocks the target Pokémon.

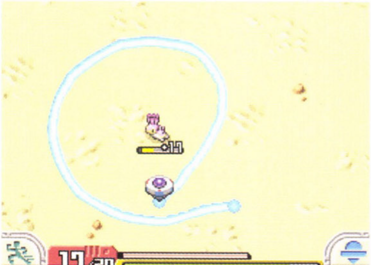


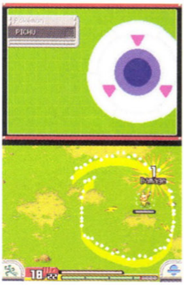
A Partner Pokémon is an especially friendly Pokémon that always goes with a Ranger.





Partner Pokémon such as Munchlax, Pachirisu, and Starly are ready to help their Ranger pals.



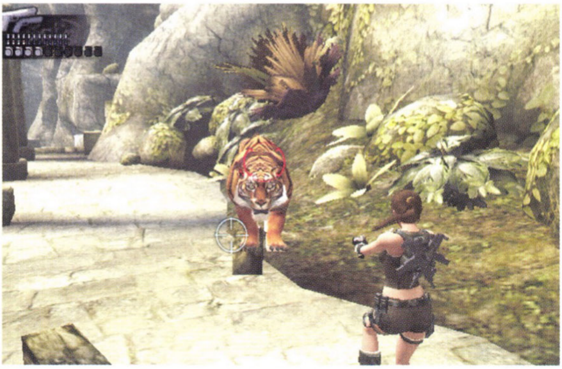


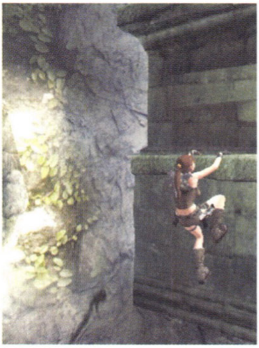
Underworld Evolution

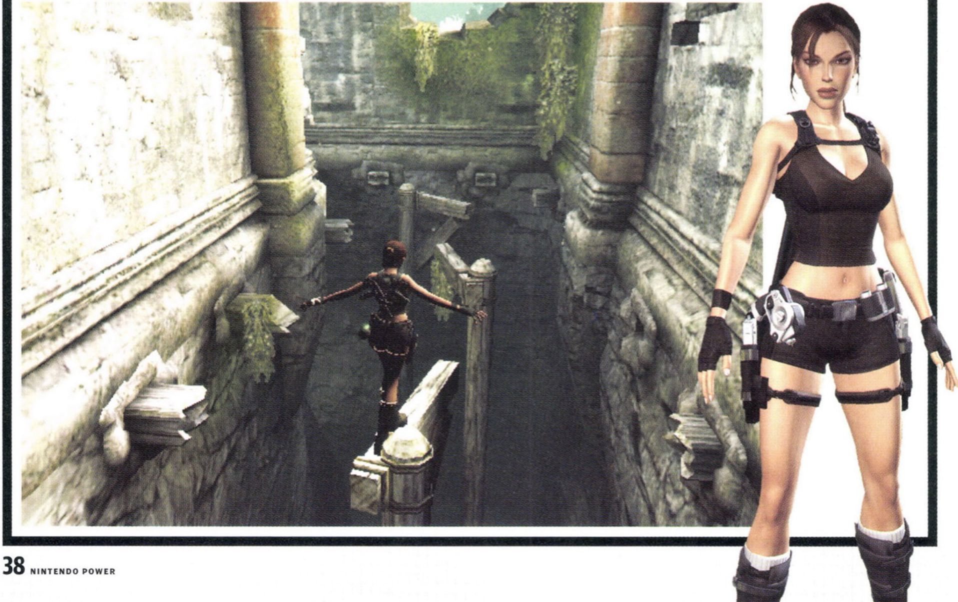
>TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

PLATFORM: Wii (ALSO ON DS) • **PUBLISHER:** EIDOS
DEVELOPER: BUZZ MONKEY/CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2008

When you've traversed the entire surface of the globe, where else can you go? Underground, of course—Lara's latest adventure has her digging up ancient mythical treasures as usual, but the emphasis this time is on exploring vast subterranean tombs. Getting to these temples is an adventure in itself, giving you all of the platforming goodness you expect from the franchise: in the level we played, we scaled cliffs and ruins on the coast of Thailand in search of Thor's hammer. (What a Norse god's hammer would be doing in Thailand is another mystery altogether.) After climbing the various rock formations—a feat that requires the use of Lara's new abilities, such as the Mario-esque wall-jumping—and shooting a handful of ferocious tigers and giant lizards called Naga (by holding Z and pointing at the screen with the Wii remote), we finally reached an Angkor Wat-inspired temple and an enormous statue of Hindu deities Shiva and Kali. We didn't get to enter the catacombs beneath the statue, but we were pleased that everything we played before then felt exactly like a Tomb Raider game should. —JUSTIN C.







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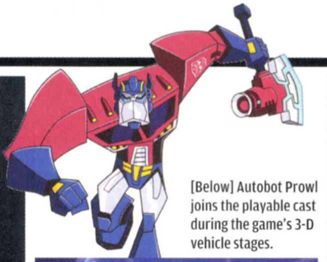
Prime Time

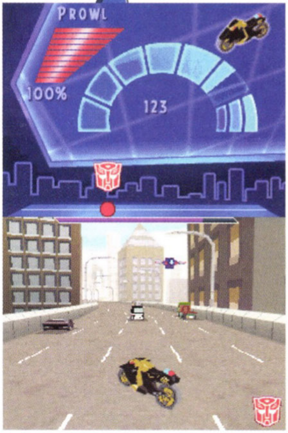
> TRANSFORMERS ANIMATED: THE GAME

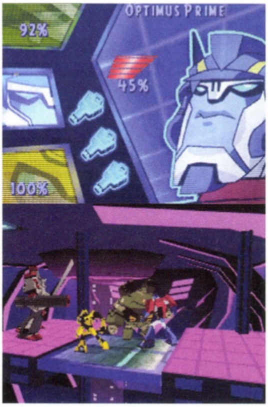
PLATFORM: DS • **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: A2M • **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 2008

Based on the new toy line and Cartoon Network show, Transformers Animated: The Game lets you take control of the latest incarnation of the ever-popular robots in disguise—but it might not be what you'd expect. Instead of waging an all-out battle against the Decepticons, the game is a much more cerebral affair. There's plenty of blasting, to be sure, but you'll spend more time tackling puzzles than destroying foes. The trick to navigating the game's levels is to use each character's unique skills: speedy Bumblebee can jump, spring off of walls, and operate special machinery; brawny Bulkhead can smash walls, move heavy objects, and crush stuff with his wrecking ball; and Optimus Prime can climb with his grappling hook and precisely throw his battle axe (you draw its path on the touch screen). You'll have to use all three characters, Lost Vikings-style, to put an end to Megatron's plan to conquer Cybertron. And although you can't change forms at will, 3-D vehicle-mode stages give you a chance to transform and roll out. **—CHRIS H.**



[Below] Autobot Prowl joins the playable cast during the game's 3-D vehicle stages.



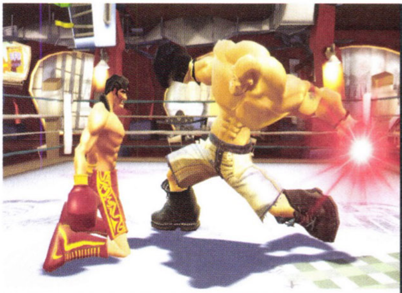


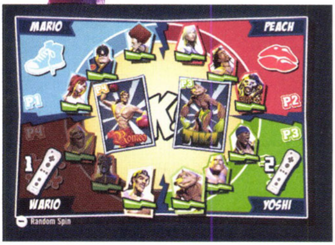
Face Off

> FACEBREAKER K.O. PARTY

PLATFORM: Wii • **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: EA CANADA • **RELEASE:** NOVEMBER 2008

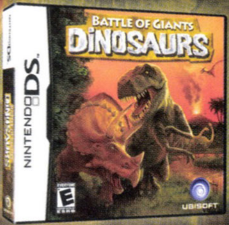
With FaceBreaker nearing its November release, we finally got to put on the gloves for some multiplayer fisticuffs. In addition to straight-up exhibition matches, EA's arcade-style boxer offers a pair of pugilistic party modes that are exclusive to the Wii version. In T.K.O., two to four players take turns drafting teams of three from the game's roster of offbeat fighters, then duke it out in an elimination tournament. It's a simple idea, but a great way of getting more people involved in what's inherently a two-person activity. The other mode, Punch-O-Matic, is a bit more unorthodox. A slot machine determines each player's boxer, as well as the venue and special mode-specific conditions for the bout. In Xterminator, for example, only one fighter can do damage, and his opponent is tasked with merely surviving until the end of the round. Frost Bite, meanwhile, places a zig-zagging ice marker on the mat that temporarily freezes any fighter with whom it comes in contact. If you're looking for a fun, light-hearted excuse to pummel your friends, FaceBreaker is definitely one to keep an eye on. **—STEVE T.**





Winning fighters in T.K.O. get to stick around, but only with whatever health they have remaining at the end of their last match. That introduces an element of strategy in deciding who to challenge next.

FIGHT TO WIN THE BATTLE OF GIANTS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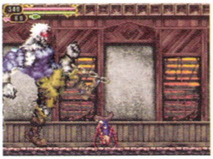
Call to Order

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA

PLATFORM: DS • **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
DEVELOPER: KONAMI • **RELEASE:** OCTOBER 2008

After spending more time with the latest Castlevania adventure, two things became readily apparent: 1) Order of Ecclesia isn't straying far from the action-RPG formula that's made the series such a hit on DS, and 2) the incremental adjustments Konami is making are pretty cool. Case in point: the world map allows for much more diverse environments, including forests, mountain passes, a prison fortress, and an ocean channel with routes both above and below the water. While some areas are focused on the usual nonlinear exploration, others are built purely on action as you make your way from one end to the other. One place you'll visit a lot is Wygol Village; as you rescue its citizens, they'll provide you with side quests that unlock new items and equipment upon completion. In addition, heroine Shanoa's Glyphs add a new dimension to combat through a flexible system that combines standard weapons, subweapons, and magic (both defensive and offensive) into a unifying whole; finding the best Glyph combinations adds extra strategy. We've also been impressed by the pattern-based bosses (who seem to require a more tactical approach than in Castlevanias past), as well as the intriguing story. When we caught up with antagonist Albus, he freely surrendered part of the all-powerful Dominus Glyph before departing. We're looking forward to uncovering his motives—and everything else about Order of Ecclesia—as the game nears its release date. **—CHRIS H.**

Shanoa is well-armed and ready to go.



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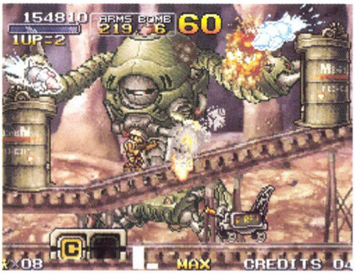
Army of One

>METAL SLUG 7

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **IGNITION** • DEVELOPER: **SNK PLAYMORE** • RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

SNK's Metal Slug has long been known as one of the best arcade run-and-gun shoot-'em-up series out there, and even though Metal Slug 7 is designed from the ground up as a DS original, it doesn't stray from its proven formula of "blast away and go, go, go!" It's you versus General Morden's forces in seven stages of nonstop action; from ruined cities and desolate mines to snowy fields and enemy bases, you'll battle armies of foot soldiers, tanks, choppers, jeeps, and new elite units that are armed with special energy weapons. One against hundreds might not sound like a fair fight, but don't worry: as always, you'll have access to weapon power-ups both familiar (shotguns, lasers, grenade launchers, homing missiles, and more) and new (the Thundershot electricity cannon), along with the ability to use powerful Metal Slug vehicles, such as the trainlike Trolly Slug and the new Slug Gigantus (a giant mech). Three difficulty settings make the game accessible for players of any skill level, and a built-in autofire option helps keep the action manageable. Other than a lack of multiplayer, Metal Slug 7 is as true to its roots as it can get. —**CHRIS H.**



In addition to fighting wave after wave of enemy troops, you'll battle an insane collection of mammoth bosses. Don't expect typical military equipment; most are monstrous mechs.

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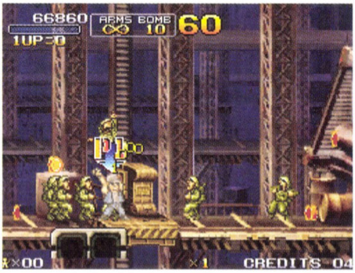

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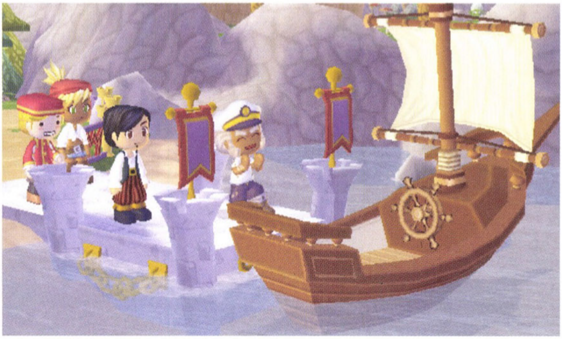
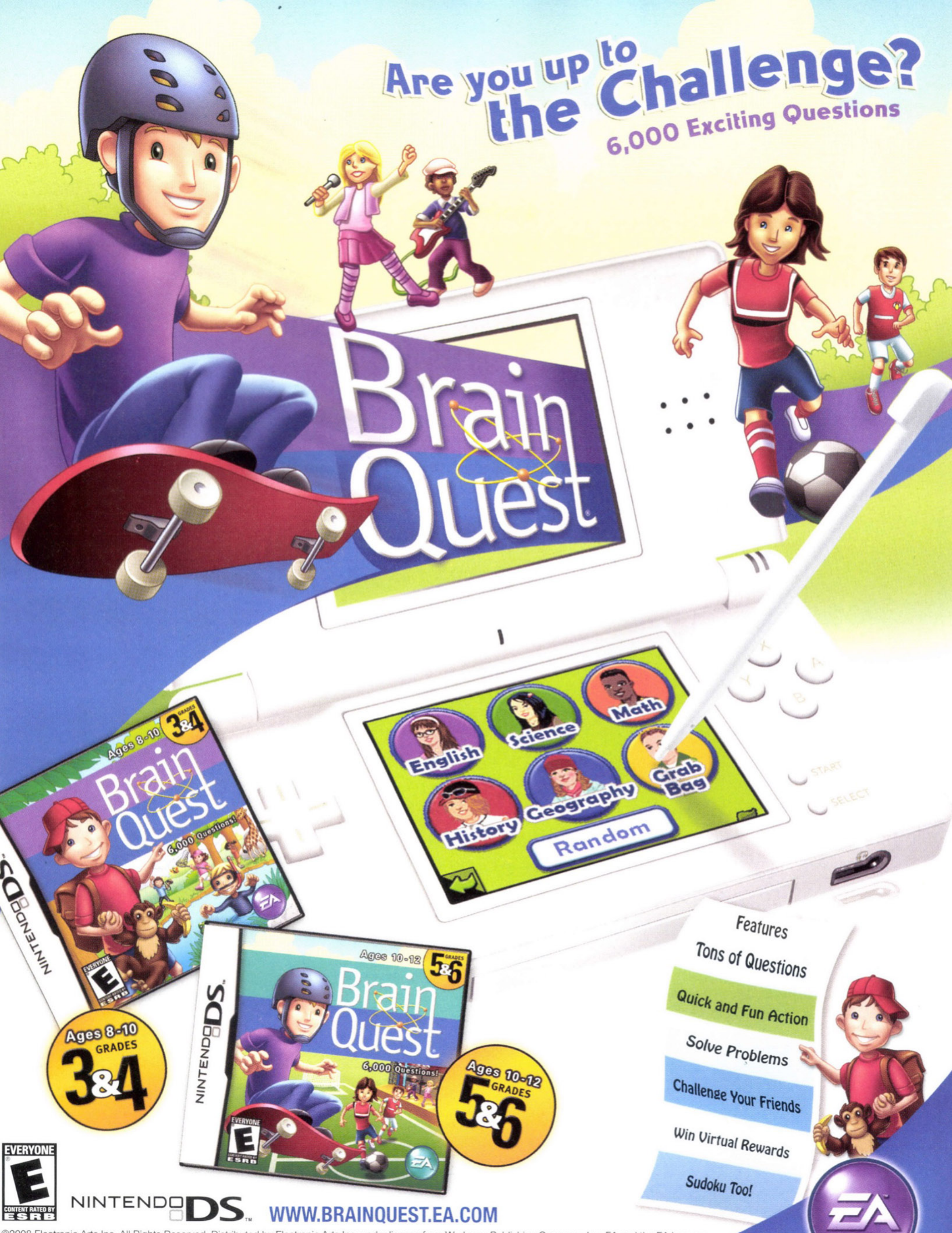
Have Wand, Will Travel

>MYSIMS KINGDOM

PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS** • DEVELOPER: **EA REDWOOD SHORES**
RELEASE: **OCTOBER 2008**

As a pig-herder-turned-Wandolier, you're tasked with going from island to island—each with its own motif, such as medieval or Wild West—with your pals, lending a helping wand to King Roland and his subjects. As your title implies, you wield a magic wand that you use to build bridges, gears, furniture, houses, and whatever else the people demand. You can't create things out of thin air, of course; you have to collect resources—mana, wood, apples, metal, fish, etc.—by using an axe, a metal detector-like treasure finder, a fishing rod, or a pickaxe. Once you've gathered enough of the appropriate widgets, you can spend them to build objects and unlock new blueprints. Construction is all Wii remote-controlled: press the + button to start building and use the pointer to select and place items. Don't worry about setting stuff in the wrong place—the game tells you where things go for the most part, but you can customize certain aspects if you want. —**JUSTIN C.**

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Purple Reign

> THE LEGEND OF SPYRO: DAWN OF THE DRAGON

PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **SIERRA**
DEVELOPER: **ETRANGES LIBELLULES**
RELEASE: **OCTOBER 2008**

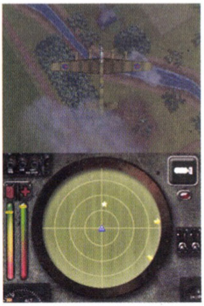
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon begins with Spyro and his female companion, Cynder, emerging from a deep slumber to discover that they've been transported to the Mines of Moria. Well, not really, but between clamoring goblins, collapsing bridges, a giant fiery creature, and the voice of Elijah Wood as Spyro, Dawn of the Dragon definitely continues the *Lord of the Rings* feel that was established by its predecessors. The game also aims to deliver a comparably epic story, as Spyro and Cynder (and their nonplayable feline ally Hunter) must free the world from the thrall of the evil Malefor (voiced by Mark Hamill). Luckily, you have tons of tools at your disposal to do it. Not only can you unleash a wide array of melee attacks and fly at any time, but you can scale walls, throw enemies, command eight types of elemental powers, and use special team-up moves. You can even play the game with a friend in co-op mode, which lets you share health and mana if one of you gets in trouble. —**CHRIS H.**

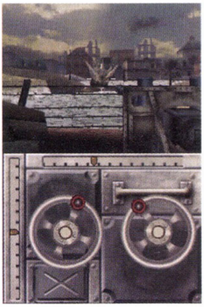
Little Big One

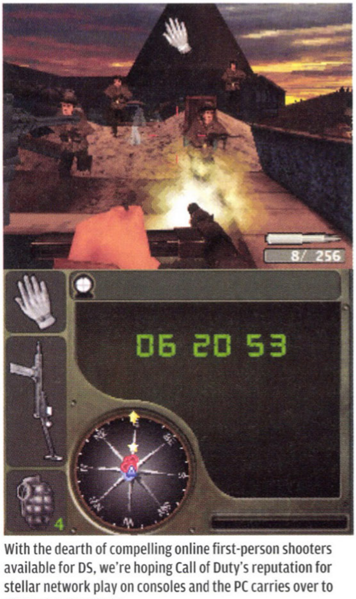
> CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

PLATFORM: **DS (ALSO ON Wii)** • PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **N-SPACE** • RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

After a brief foray into modernity, Call of Duty returns to familiar territory: World War II. The big difference this time, however, is that rather than focusing on European battlegrounds, the game is set in the Pacific theater, where jungles and guerilla fighting present new challenges for US troops (though you do combat Nazis in the Russian campaign, as you defend your homeland from invading Germans). That said, the DS version's gameplay remains the same as the DS version of Call of Duty 4: run around with the Control Pad, fire with R or L, and aim the reticle and select weapons with the stylus. There are a number of minigames as well, such as defending a fleet of ships from incoming Japanese Zeros or performing a bombing run in one of the DS-exclusive British missions. One thing that was missing from the previous handheld game was online multiplayer; thankfully, you can now play the returning four-player Hunter/Prey and Team Deathmatch modes via Wi-Fi, and you can then upload your stats to impress your friends. —**JUSTIN C.**







With the dearth of compelling online first-person shooters available for DS, we're hoping Call of Duty's reputation for stellar network play on consoles and the PC carries over to Nintendo's handheld.

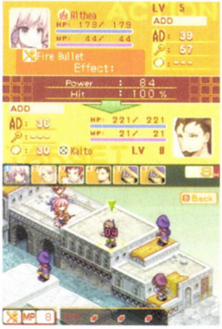
Shining Brighter

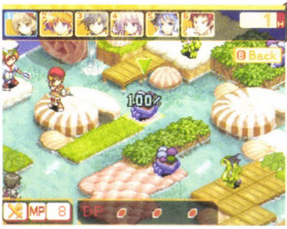
>LUMINOUS ARC 2

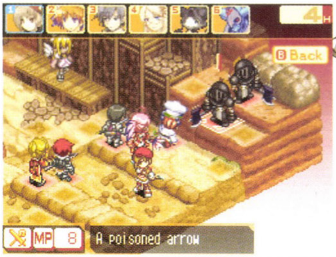
PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **IMAGEEPOCH** • RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

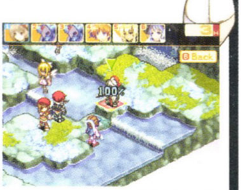
During an interview for the original Luminous Arc last year, imageepoch head Ryoei Mikage told us, "This game was designed to be a series from the get-go, with the first game concentrating on the characters, then strengthening the game systems in the second and third titles." And based on what we've played of Luminous Arc 2 thus far, the developers appear to be sticking to the plan.

For the most part, the improvements come in the form of greater flexibility and more strategic options. Take the Flash Drive system, for instance. As in the first game, you'll earn Drive Points for every action in battle, only now you can spend them on more than just special Flash Drive moves—you can also use them to increase the effectiveness of standard skills and even healing items. Postbattle intermissions return, as well, again allowing you to bond with your fellow party members. This time, however, the guesswork of who you'll be able to chat with following certain battles is eliminated thanks to a Volunteer icon that appears next to the pertinent allies preskirmish. You'll have more ways to customize your combatants, too, including equippable Lapis stones that bestow the wearer with special bonuses such as increased resistance to fire magic or more hit points. To go along with that greater gameplay depth, Luminous Arc 2 promises to be considerably more challenging than its pushover predecessor. —**STEVE T.**









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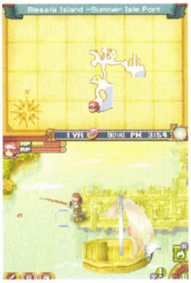
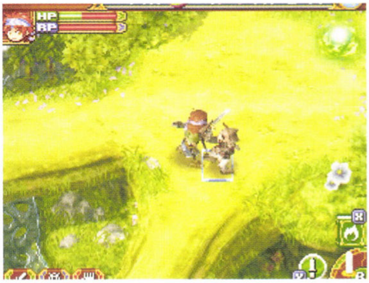
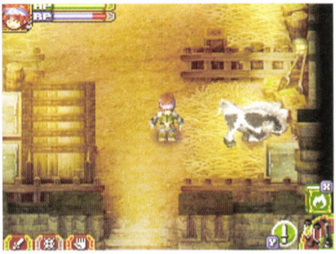
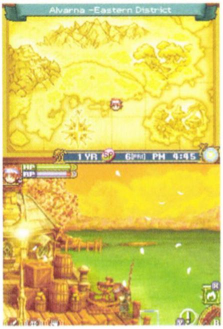




We love Rune Factory's melding of farm simulation and action-RPG, but why not take it a step further, allowing you to not only raise cows, but ride them into combat and equip them with armor? We want our battle cattle!





Fall Harvest

>RUNE FACTORY 2: A FANTASY HARVEST MOON

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **NATSUME**
DEVELOPER: **MARVELOUS** • RELEASE: **OCTOBER 2008**

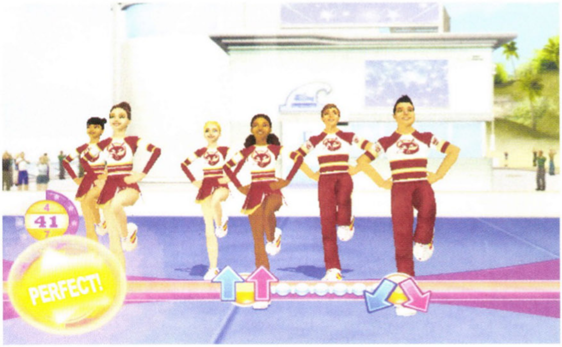
Natsume is going all out to celebrate the 10th anniversary of its signature series. Summer brought us new chapters in the Harvest Moon saga for the DS and Wii. In the fall we will be farming and fighting in the follow-up to last year's Rune Factory. Rune Factory 2 churns out the basic formula of its predecessor. You are an outsider in new surroundings—this time the village Alvarna—looking for a place to settle down. Not only do you have a farm to tend to and relationships to forge, but you must venture out of the village to slay monsters and defend the kingdom against a new threat. The game's graphics are a notch more beautiful than those of the first title, and the audio includes some voiced dialogue. If you're at a loss for things to do and people to meet, you can consult a town bulletin board to learn about side quests and see a fortune-teller to discover the current location of all townspeople. Once your character, Kyle, marries and starts a family, his son will take up adventuring for a round of new challenges. It's like a sequel within a sequel. —**GEORGE S.**

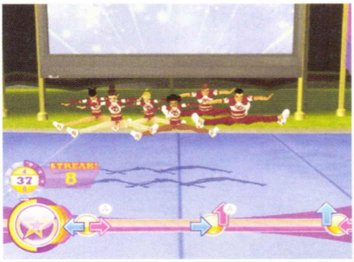
Wii Got Spirit, Yes Wii Do

>ALL STAR CHEER SQUAD

PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **GORILLA** • RELEASE: **OCTOBER 2008**

No Wii cheerleading game has quite the depth or authenticity of All Star Cheer Squad. (There's only one other that we know of, but still....) After selecting your gender and customizing your appearance, you dive right into cheerleading competitions, moving your remote and nunchuk like pom-poms to match the onscreen arrows. It's easy to pick up and play at the outset, but at higher difficulty levels the routines are faster-paced and include button presses. For more of a challenge, you can add the Wii Balance Board to the mix, stepping on and off the peripheral as necessary. (Sadly, only one person can play with the Balance Board during versus or co-op games.) If the routines designed by Tony G—who worked on the *Bring It On* flicks and is the announcer in this game—aren't enough for you, you can design your own; with 30 songs and nearly 300 moves to choose from, you can spend hours creating the perfect routine. —**JUSTIN C.**





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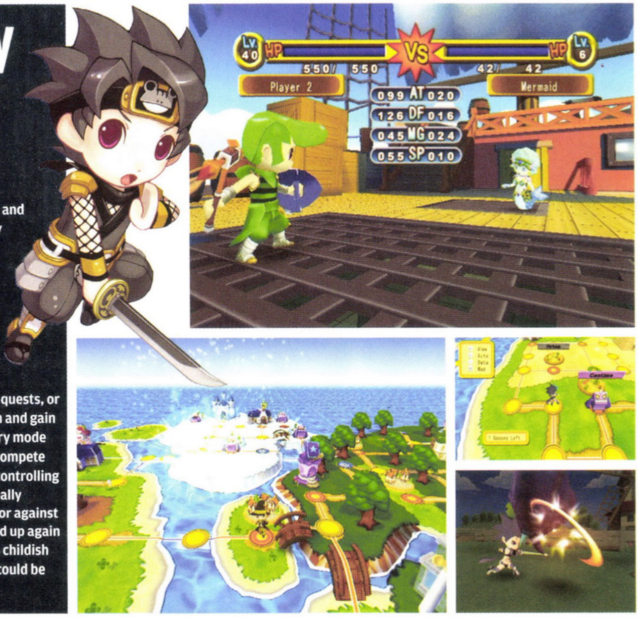
Form a Party

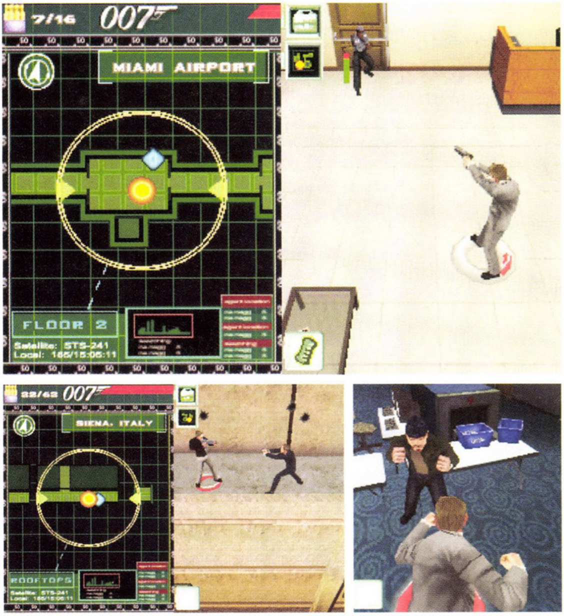
>DOKAPON KINGDOM

PLATFORM: Wii • PUBLISHER: ATLUS
DEVELOPER: STING • RELEASE: OCTOBER 2008

When we first saw Dokapon Kingdom we thought it looked a lot like Mario Party—players are placed on a game board and move around using spinners that randomly generate the number of spaces you can move each turn. Then we played it, and found out it was wholly unlike anything we've seen before.

That's because Dokapon Kingdom is as much an RPG as it is a party game: players move around the board, and depending on where you land you'll gain items or spells, fight monsters, embark on quests, or even liberate towns to raise your net worth and gain tax income. The game has an engaging story mode as well as quick-play modes, in which you compete with other players to reach a goal such as controlling towns or killing other players. The game really shines in multiplayer, as you can play with or against friends, and games can be saved and picked up again at any time. Hopefully Dokapon Kingdom's childish looks won't drive people away, because it could be the life of the party. **—TOM H.**





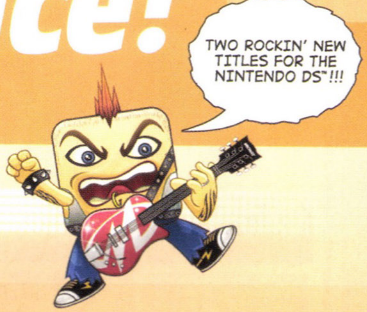
Spy vs. Spies

>QUANTUM OF SOLACE

PLATFORM: DS (ALSO ON Wii) • PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: VICARIOUS VISIONS
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2008

If you've seen the *Quantum of Solace* movie trailer, you already know that 007 is out for revenge against a shadowy organization that has "people everywhere." The DS game follows the film's plot and features the voices and likenesses of the film's actors, but it has a few surprises when it comes to the gameplay—most notably the fact that everything's stylus-controlled. Movement, crouching, and item selection are all on the touch screen, and there's a map on the other screen. The face buttons are used to toggle combat modes, so if you run up to an enemy and hold any of the buttons, for example, you'll enter melee combat mode. If you slide the stylus up, down, left, or right, you'll punch in that direction, or you can draw a small circle on the screen to grab and throw your opponent. Bond uses firearms, too, of course; with a gun equipped, you hold a face button to enter ranged combat mode and simply tap on a baddie to shoot. **—JUSTIN C.**

Twice as Nice!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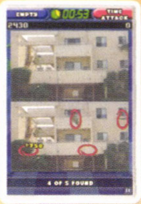

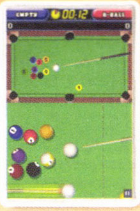

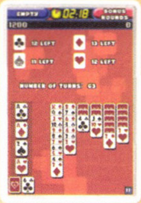

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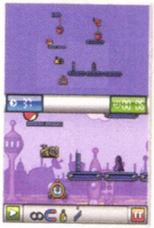

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NINTENDO DS™ MIDWAY

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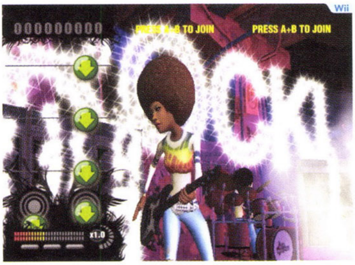

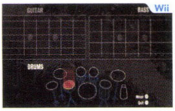

Wii
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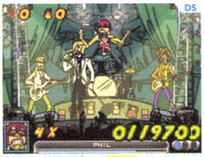
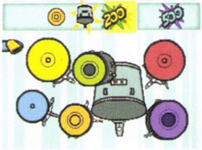
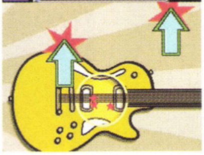
PRESS A+B TO JOIN
PRESS A+B TO JOIN
AWESOME!
x1.0





DS
ROCK
0004000
JIMMY



Join the Revolution

>ROCK REVOLUTION

PLATFORM: **Wii, DS** • PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **HB STUDIOS** • RELEASE: **FALL 2008**

The Guitar Hero/Rock Band model for rock rhythm games is pretty accepted by now, but Rock Revolution for Wii and DS takes a decidedly different approach. Requiring nothing more than the system and default controllers, Rock Revolution will allow you to rock out with your friends for a fraction of the price of those other games.

When playing drums on Wii, the nunchuk and remote become your sticks and you shake them to hit imaginary drums, while on guitar you press "frets" on the nunchuk (the C and Z Buttons) and strum with the remote. Unlike the Wii iteration, the DS version supports singing (with the built-in mic), and for other instruments you strum or tap out beats on the touch screen. With multiple modes and impressive track lists featuring hits like The Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again" and The Killers' "Somebody Told Me," Rock Revolution looks to be a solid, if different, contender for the rhythm-genre crown. **—TOM H.**

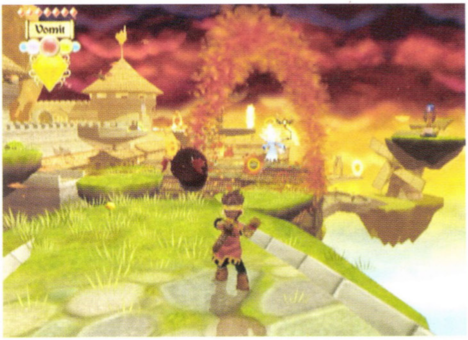
Liquid Courage

>SPRAY

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **TECMO**
DEVELOPER: **EKO SYSTEM** • RELEASE: **OCTOBER 2008**

SPRay tells of a young prince who sets out to save his kingdom with the aid of two powerful guardian spirits. Sounds like a pretty typical video game premise, right? Until you consider that one of the ways the spirits lend their assistance is by vomiting. As the title implies, this Wii-exclusive platformer centers around spewing a variety of liquids, using the Wii remote to aim your regurgitated vengeance. And the mechanic is put to clever use. To prevent a fan from blowing you off a cliff, for instance, you can coat the ground with gooey slime for extra traction as you cross. Trying to track down an invisible foe? Hose the floors with vomit and watch for footprints. Sure it's sorta gross, but the lives of your subjects are at stake! The liquids also come in handy during combat. As one particularly nasty enemy spun toward us like a tornado, we slimed him to slow his assault, knocked off his armor with the prince's sword, then sprayed the exposed beast with water to dissolve his ephemeral form.

It's not the prettiest game, and it could still use a bit of polish, but SPRay's unique approach certainly holds promise. **—STEVE T.**



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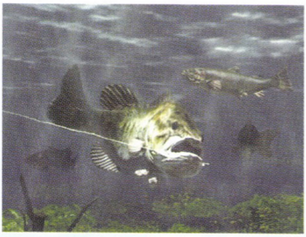

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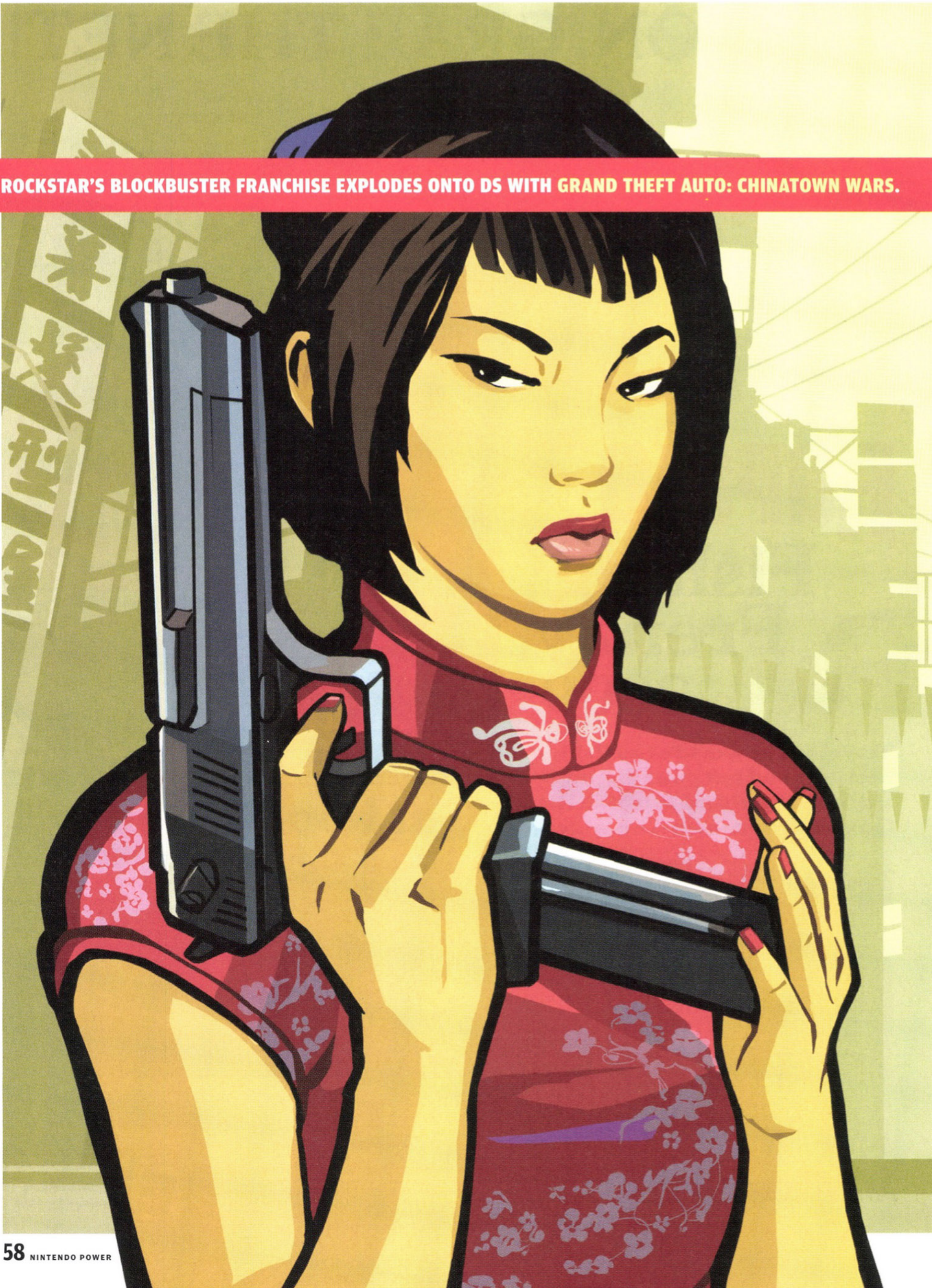
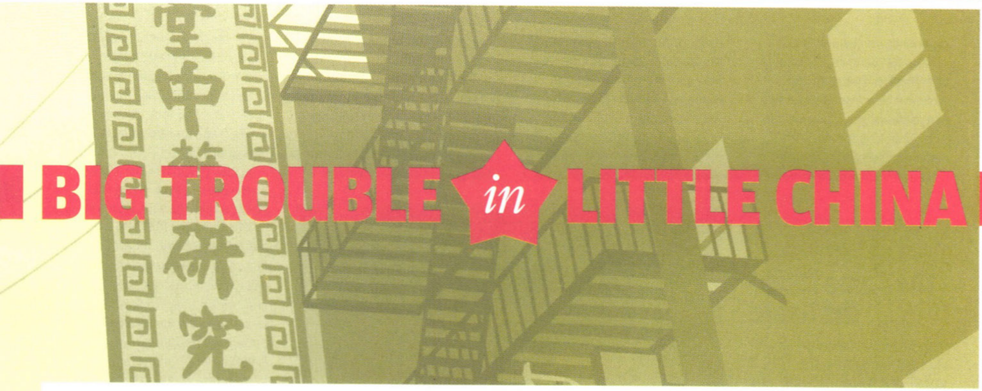
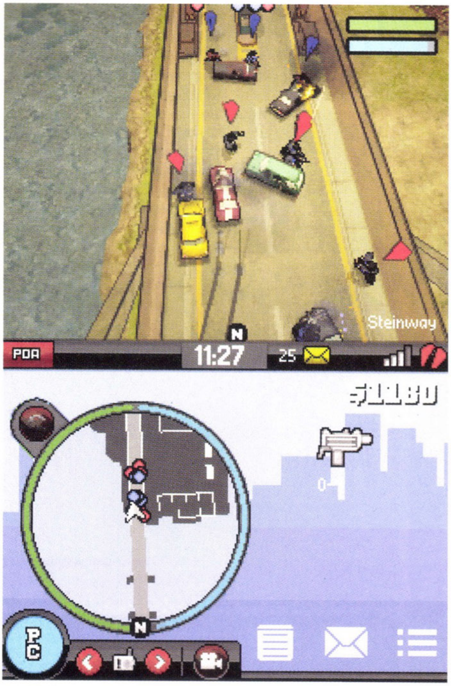


ROCKSTAR'S BLOCKBUSTER FRANCHISE EXPLODES ONTO DS WITH **GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS.**



BIG TROUBLE *in* LITTLE CHINA

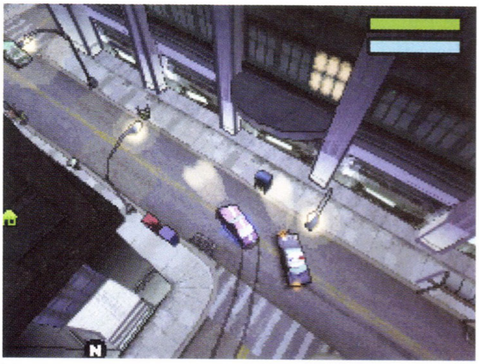
Grand Theft Auto on the Nintendo DS: What will it look like? What will it play like? Will our greatest fears of a dumbed-down, kid-oriented, mini-game-heavy version of the international phenomenon be realized? With bated breath, each and every one of us waited for the details to pour out of the floodgates following Nintendo's E3 announcement of the game, only to be met with deafening silence—until now.



In our exclusive unveiling of Rockstar Games's DS opus, Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars, we bring you the first gameplay details, hands-on impressions, and images of a game that you knew was technologically possible, but had no idea how it would be done.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

Before anything else is said, let one thing be clear: Chinatown Wars is a GTA game through and through (and yes, that will include a Mature rating). From the sandbox nature of the gameplay to the open-world environment to the gritty crime narrative that drives it all home, the game can easily match its console predecessors in terms of signature features. The way every detail has been tailored specifically for the Nintendo DS hardware elevates the game from a hardware-challenged port to an



Chinatown Wars certainly looks different than the more contemporary GTAs, but it still retains almost everything you like about those games.

BY KAISER HWANG

experience unique unto itself.

Take, for instance, the camera placement. It's not quite the birds-eye view from the first two GTA games (three, if you include GTA: London), and clearly it's nothing close to the standard third-person perspective found in the series' later iterations; the isometric angle provides the best possible view at all times given the size and resolution of the DS's screens. Similarly, the cel-shaded polygons with heavy black borders give each piece of the world enough contrast to be clearly identified, day or night, rain or shine.

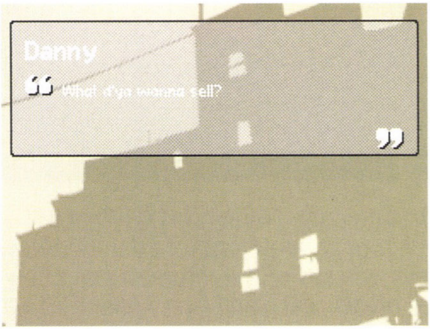
Chinatown's use of the touch screen is also to be commended. Rather than shoehorn the game to rely primarily on the touch screen for controls—a trend that's all too common with DS titles—the developers at Rockstar Leeds have integrated touch control when appropriate, both for tasteful minigames (see the "Reach Out and Touch Someone" sidebar) and for streamlining the user interface.

In fact, much of the UI is based on the use of a PDA, giving the touch-screen element a natural justification. The PDA acts as a hub for emails and contacts, as a map, as a music player, as a GPS while driving, and it's used for stat-tracking—you can upload those details to the Rockstar Social Club website through Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. Fortunately, many of the touch-screen icons are finger-sized, which minimizes the hassle of switching to and from the stylus during gameplay.

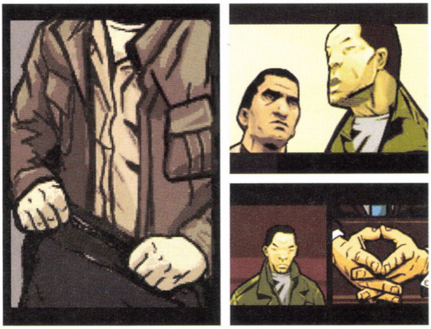
The gameplay has also received the care and attention needed to bring the GTA experience to the DS. While the core philosophies of the series remain intact, the missions have been designed for shorter spurts of play, and have a bit of an arcade quality: generous autotargeting using the R Button takes away the frustration of precision aiming using the Control Pad; a very subtle autosteer makes turning on the narrow streets easier, especially during chases; if you fail a mission, you can quickly shortcut to not only the mission, but the scene of the action; the inclusion of weapons such as a chain gun and flamethrower, the exaggerated

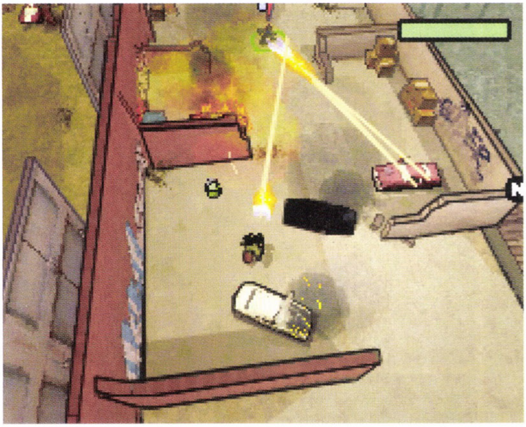
The Game inside the Game

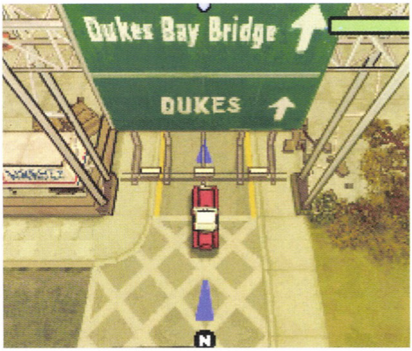
In the previous M-rated Grand Theft Auto games, the "good guys" are never out-and-out heroes, surviving and thriving in the same morally gray world as their enemies. For instance, after the Tricks of the Triad mission, Huang Lee will have the option to sell and trade drugs around Liberty City, earning—and losing—money in the process. Lee tracks this real-time economy through his PDA, complete with weekly profit-and-loss updates. The law won't sit idly by and let such criminal activity run freely, however—100 surveillance cameras have been placed around the city, which (unless destroyed) raise sale prices in covered areas. Also expect plenty of taxi-driver, firefighter, paramedic, and vigilante missions, as well as other GTA classics, including stunt jumps, rampages, random encounters, odd jobs, and more.


Danny

"What d'ya wanna sell?"







The game's called Chinatown Wars, but don't think that you'll be stuck in that area—you'll be driving through all of the boroughs of Liberty City, just like in GTA IV.

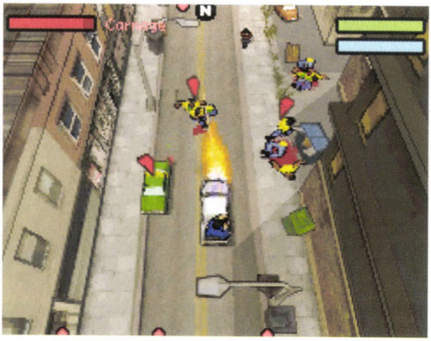
sounds of the pedestrians, and the cel-shaded visuals further stress the game's caricature of the real world.

TECHNOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGH

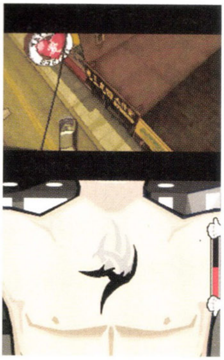
The game's graphics are impressive as well—it's not always heavy on sheer detail (it is cel-shaded, after all), but the scope and variety are fantastic. A good portion of Liberty City—including boroughs Dukes, Bohan, Broker, and Algonquin from GTA IV—is fully modeled and represented in the game (specific routes differ from the console games), with no problems with load times, draw-in issues, or frame rate. This alone is a remarkable feat, but when you factor in how densely populated the city is—there are countless pedestrians and vehicles peppered throughout the streets, all moving along with the hustle and bustle of the city—it's undeniable that Chinatown Wars is doing something no other DS game has come close to: creating that living, breathing world the GTA games are known for.

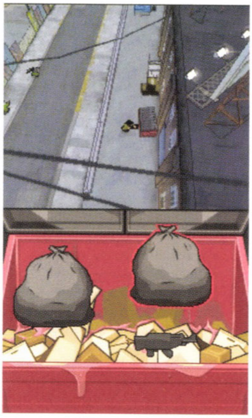
Nowhere is this clearer than in a police chase—partially because you're witness to the surprisingly aggressive AI, but mostly because of the new Wanted system. Whereas in prior GTA games escaping the radius of a Wanted level lowered your star level, in Chinatown Wars the objective is to disable the police cars any way you can, whether that means running them off the road or simply crashing into them headfirst. During these chaotic chases you become aware just how vast and congested Liberty City is, as you drive around the city, destroying street lights, running over pedestrians, and hopping from your smoking (and stolen) taxi onto a newly parked motorcycle, all in pursuit of a lower Wanted level.

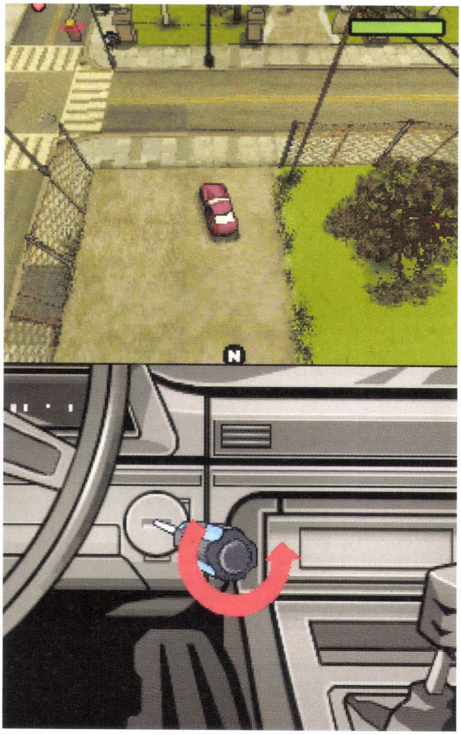
A number of other graphical touches further emphasize the city's organic vibe. There are real-time weather effects and a 24-hour day/night cycle, transparent headlights



The stylus is put to good use with a myriad of mini-games.







Reach Out and Touch Someone

We were privy to only a few implementations of the touch-screen minigames, but each one was simple and clever in an almost WarioWare fashion, and folded seamlessly into both the action and story elements of the game. Here's a breakdown of what we played:

GLASS-BREAKING After driving a car off a bridge and into the water, the touch screen immediately showcased the image of a car windshield. Tap it enough times to break it, and swim to safety.

HOTWIRING Some cars need extra motivation to get running—in our case that motivation was a screwdriver in the steering column. Other cars may require varying levels of hotwiring.

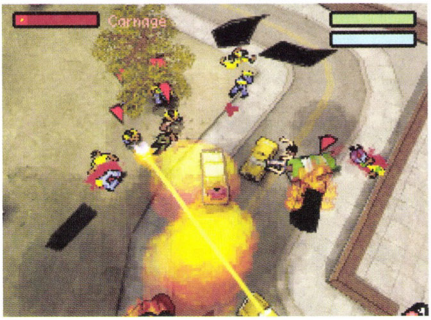
TRASH-DIGGING We threw aside bags of trash in a dumpster to find a weapon buried at the bottom.

BOMB-MAKING Driving up to gas stations allows you to make Molotov cocktails. Use the gas nozzle to fill up as many bottles as you can within the time limit.

TATTOOING What's a member of the Triads without a tattoo—especially one inked by using the stylus to stay within the lines?

While it's infamous for its violence, GTA is also known for its humor and memorable characters, and Chinatown Wars continues that trend.

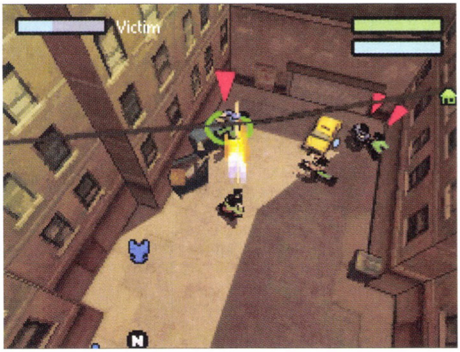
illuminate the streets at night, fiery muzzle flashes show off the weapons' ferocity, and exploding cars demonstrate the game's proprietary physics system. (The game delivers aurally as well, with a wide variety of radio stations to listen to on the fly—but you should expect more in the way of instrumentals than vocal hits.) The moment you see the game in motion is the moment when you will become a believer in what Rockstar Leeds has done with the DS hardware and over 800,000 lines of hand-optimized code.



THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

It's easy to imagine that the announcement of Chinatown Wars was met with as much skepticism as curiosity. After all, the DS isn't the strongest handheld system in terms of raw processing power, and no other handheld game has attempted anything near the scale of a GTA title. These facts alone make what Rockstar Leeds have accomplished so far on Chinatown Wars a prodigious feat, and we have yet to learn any details on the confirmed multiplayer modes and other Wi-Fi features.

Although only a small, small fraction of the game has been unveiled to us, the essence of a fully realized GTA world is indisputably in place. We now know the game *can* be done, and will be done right. We absolutely can't wait to play more when Chinatown Wars hits stores this winter.



Parts of this game remind us of Max Payne on GBA. Makes sense, though—it's the same developer.

Once Upon a Time in Chinatown

As with all GTA games, a gang-themed plotline pushes Chinatown Wars forward, with key points told through hand-painted cut-scenes and limited animations. The game's story centers around Huang Lee, a member of the Chinese Triads, who must deliver his just-assassinated father's Yu Jian, a supposed family heirloom and sword, to his Uncle Wu "Kenny" Lee. The inevitable ambush occurs along the way, and Huang must not only recover the sword, but avenge his father's death in the process. Here are the five missions we got to check out:

YU JIAN This introductory mission begins with Huang being robbed of the Yu Jian and left for dead at the bottom of the Humboldt River. He must then head to Uncle Kenny's restaurant (Sum Yung Gai) and inform him of the situation. From there you establish your first safe house in the game.

STREET OF RAGE You must run to the aid of Wade Heston, a cop who is working with Huang, as he is ambushed by a mob of Korean assassins named the Wonsu Nodong. To reach Wade, you must defeat a chain-gun-wielding assassin by any means necessary. This mission introduces the grenade-throwing mechanic, where touching farther from the center of the touch-screen icon increases the range of your throw.

TRICKS OF THE TRIAD This mission requires Huang to travel around Liberty City selling drugs to earn cash. It ultimately ends in a police bust, and Huang must escape a two-star Wanted level before making it back to his safe house.

RECRUITMENT DRIVE Huang first saves three potential Triads from opposing gangs and recruits them into his own. The final part of the initiation requires Huang to tattoo the new recruits using the touch screen.

DRIVEN TO DESTRUCTION By far the most outrageous and fun of the missions we played, this one has Huang driving with a fellow chain-gun-equipped Triad in the back of a truck while he exterminates the Jamaican gang members around the city. Just fill up the Carnage meter to complete the mission.

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THE KING OF LIBERTY CITY

In addition to our time with Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars, we were given a rare opportunity to have a one-on-one chat with Rockstar Games cofounder Dan Houser. Ironically, *he* asked the first question.

DAN HOUSER So what did you think?

NINTENDO POWER It's everything I expected, and at the same time, nothing like I expected.
Well, that's a good answer. I'm pleased with that [laughs]. I think we hoped for that kind of response. Our goal was to make something where you'd say that, which is always a challenge—but particularly a challenge when you move from PS3 and Xbox 360 to DS in your mindset. Our goal was to make a game that was GTA—that captured all of the essence of what GTA is, and has always been—and brought back some good bits from the past, but also evolved onto some completely unique new things, but still felt every single second—from seeing the title, playing the title, looking at the title, considering the title, fiddling around with it in all the little ways you can—that it's a GTA game. But at the same time, something new and fresh and not like what you expected.

Actually, that almost exactly describes how I was feeling.
Well that's perfect then. It's good to see because it's been a long time since I've been present with someone that's seeing [one of our games] for the first time, you know what I mean? So it's good to hear that.

Why now? Why this DS game now?
I don't really know. We kind of just figured out what it would be. We'd had a lot of fun and success making games for the PSP, and it's the same team making this game—the team in Leeds who have got to be one of the most successful external handheld developers in the world at the moment. And they were very, very keen—Gordon [Hall, Rockstar Leeds studio head] and all his guys I think are awesome—to make a DS game, and it took a while for us all to figure out what format it would take. You know what I mean? We don't necessarily look at things from a business perspective in that way. We look at stuff from a product perspective—what's unique about this game?

It's the things we were just talking about. How do we make a game that is GTA but on a DS? That was a huge problem to crack. In some ways that was a more complicated problem to crack than how to make a GTA game on the PSP. That's probably why those [PSP games] came about earlier—because it was easier [to figure out what we were trying to do]. And we weren't interested in rushing a game out or anything. For us, it's like, we've got one shot at this. There's one chance to make a really cool game for a Nintendo platform and make it really work for us. We've got to get it right.

It's been in development quite a while, and we've been playing around with a few different things, but really that was before we started. Going into development, it was figuring out what the thing was going to be and doing some tests and some preproduction work on that. That was really the challenge rather than, "Oh, there's this great moment now." The DS is obviously successful, but we've always tried to work with lots of different hardware, and always will.

It seems like a more natural progression for the series to move to Wii rather than the DS. Is there any reason you didn't take it there first?

> "[THIS IS A] GTA GAME THAT HAPPENS TO BE ON A HANDHELD. [IT'S NOT A] BUDGET GAME THAT WE'RE PUSHING OUT..."

It didn't feel natural to us, I guess. It really was that the DS felt like it had a lot of interesting challenges that would be totally different from what we'd done in the past. The stylus and the chance to use minigames in that way was really interesting and exciting to us, and we thought we could integrate seamlessly between those two modes. And it would be the chance to make something really good on a handheld with our handheld-focused team. That was really why we went that way. We haven't really done any concrete, major thinking about the Wii, one way or another. They're sort of separate issues.

Like I said before, when playing the game I really felt like I was playing a GTA game. What do you think makes this game feel like a GTA game?
Lots of things. Above all, from a design perspective, freedom of movement—fluidity. An open world is obviously the number-one most important thing. The performance we're getting out of the DS. That means you get a load of cars, a load of cops, and quite intense firefights on the screen—which is really crazy, seeing the DS pumping that many bad guys and that many good guys on the screen at once. That energy is something that's very important to GTA.

It's got to feel like a city—it can't feel like a ghost town with some geometry laid out and nothing there. GTA's about the city. GTA's about freedom of movement. GTA's about intense action from a game-design perspective. Then it's capturing the kind of humor and spirit of GTA from a character perspective, and a writing perspective, a storytelling perspective. We obviously had to redesign how we do those things on the DS, but I still feel we got there with that. On the one hand it starts to feel like a classic DS adventure game in some ways, but on the other hand it's got GTA's spirit and sense of humor built into it.

The same thing with the radio. We'll have—when it's finally working—music where you can bounce around different stations and stuff, so it will still feel like GTA but for the DS format. That's how we looked at all that stuff. We're even adding in whole new stuff like the PDA. It's got to feel like something that works on the DS, and also something that works in the confines of what GTA is. If it doesn't, the spirit of GTA is gone. Figuring out what that spirit is in terms of game design, in terms of world-building, in terms of mission design, in terms of humor, in terms of characterization, and making sure you capture those as best you can as you design for DS, using those things as your guiding principles.

I'm pretty sure this will be an M-rated game.
I think so. GTA kind of has to be.

How's support from Nintendo been on the title?
Great. It's been really fun working with them. We were very keen on the game being M-rated, and there was never really any issue with that. It's been fun to work with them. They're really behind it, as you saw at E3. We have no experience doing DS games, and not that much experience with Nintendo games, and we

haven't made a ground-up Nintendo game like this really since the launch of Rockstar, so it's a novel experience for us as new partners.

Did you look at the GBA version of GTA at all when making Chinatown Wars?
Not really, no. That was more of an attempt to port GTA 1 in some ways, or get some of the aspects on GTA 1 working, while this is a game built from the ground up for the hardware. We learned then in some ways what not to do—which was don't try and do things that the hardware can't support. But the DS is enough that you can get over some of the things we talked about. What is GTA? On the Game Boy version, if my memory serves me correctly, you just couldn't achieve some of those goals. You couldn't get things that didn't feel like a ghost town. The DS game is amazing when you suddenly leap out of a cop car and suddenly there's this massive firefight. It is GTA. You couldn't do that on the GBA game. So I think we've actually been able to make a GTA game this time.

What do you feel are some GTA features that, because of the technical limitations, won't make it into the game?
Well, really, the perspective. To go to the isometric view rather than make it fully 3-D. There was never any belief that we'd do anything different than that because we're always about high performance and the number of cars. I think that's the only major difference between this and the console version of the game in terms of what the game is. It's a city with a criminal adventure stuck in, and a bunch of things to do. Because we're making this game from the ground up for the DS, we were never really looking at it in terms of limitations. It's more in terms of strengths, and what works well on the hardware and what doesn't work well on the hardware. Obviously minigames work 'cause you can bounce between two screens so well. We weren't trying to compress something down this time—it's more building up for the hardware.

What you can do with the hardware.
Right. What we can do with the hardware, what can it definitely not do. We couldn't render a full-3-D city that can be fluid and heavily populated, so let's not even attempt to think about that because it's a waste of time. But we can make a game that looks spectacular for a DS game, has a ton of energy, works very well for a handheld game, moves very, very fluidly, has nicely designed missions, and nicely paced missions that work well on a handheld.

If I'm not mistaken, this is the same team that made Max Payne on the GBA, correct?
Yes.

That game actually worked really well with the isometric view and such on the GBA.
Yes. Good memory! We met those guys years and years ago when they were just starting up and were pitching us about doing a console third-person action-adventure game that I thought was cool but nothing ever came of it for some reason. That was pre-Rockstar, when I was working at BMG and moving into Take2, and it was from our perspective complicated to do those kinds of deals. They resurfaced a few years later doing some GBA games. I thought those guys were [great] back in the day, and then the option came to bring them into the family.

And Gordon and those guys are fantastic, and it was such a great meeting of like-minded spirits between us, them.... It's been a pleasure for the last three or four years to be working with them, and everything they've done has been really top quality. It doesn't feel like you're putting a B-team on this stuff. It feels like they're an A-team who just happen to work in a handheld space. That's why I think both of the GTA PSP games were so successful, and that's why I think [this DS game] will be too. We've got a really talented bunch of guys developing it with all of the GTA heads from Scotland, and all of the GTA heads from New York offering guidance and direction and stuff. But you've really got a supermotivated team doing it hands-on. It's not being farmed out to the guys who couldn't make a console game. They were great back then. I think the stuff they were getting out of the GBA was amazing.

I remember when we first starting working with them...I thought, "These guys can get amazing performance out of these machines." Their coders are superfocused on that stuff. So really it's been a great acquisition for us and a great marriage with that studio because they really love doing stuff in tiny spaces.

Are you onboard writing the script for this game?
Yeah, with the same guy, David Bland, who I worked with on Liberty City Stories and Vice City Stories. Usually I write it alongside a guy in the studio so it's a different guy at [Rockstar] North, and usually other people loop in and do bits, 'cause you really need one guy there who can check

that we're really tied into what the game designers are doing. I'll set some overview ideas, and then we'll write together after that. So yeah, absolutely.

GTA IV's story didn't touch too much on the Chinatown area. Were you consciously reserving it for this game?
Yeah, I guess—not really consciously, but they were both happening at the same time as different projects and different products both set in the same GTA universe. It's not a sequel—they're not closely related in that way—but we wanted both games to feel like they were set in Liberty City, and they're set in America, but we wanted to have very different flavors to them. We wanted it to feel like GTA, but it's hard because you have fifty different flavors in any one GTA game. GTA IV starts with Eastern European, then you have the Irish versus the Mafia, and then you get a bit of the government stuff.

This time we still needed a bit of Mafia stuff and corrupt cops and those kinds of characters because they're so good for tying stories together, and they're always fun characters to work with. We also wanted the Triads and some Korean hoodlums in this game, so it ended up being a lot of stuff we didn't touch on in GTA IV, and lots of other things as well, but we definitely want it to feel like we're covering the same territory.

Do you feel like you learned anything from making a massive game like GTA IV that you could apply to making Chinatown Wars?
Oh, definitely. We learn from every game we make. Particularly with any GTA game, you're learning—well, from the stuff that I'm heavily involved in—you learn how the story works, what works well, what doesn't work so well, how you bring in minigames, how you don't bring in minigames, how you bring in things like any kind of asset management—which we didn't do much of in GTA IV, but we had done a bit of in Vice City Stories and in San Andreas. You're always kind of learning. For this, we were looking all the way back on GTA 1 and 2 and GTA: London, all the way through to GTA IV.

The game's gone through many iterations, and we've tried loads of different ideas—some of which stuck, some which haven't. What we could pluck from all of those games to make a really tight game for the platform. It's obviously not as much production to it as GTA IV with ten-person cutscenes and 100 massive missions, but we still looked at it like it was a major production—which is exactly what we did with the PSP games. These are GTA games that happen to be on handhelds. They're not budget games that we're pushing out with a GTA logo on them and hoping that we can sell a few copies on the back of that. I don't think that works for anyone, and it certainly won't work for us. This has the full weight and energy of a full GTA production—obviously cut to the scale that the platform can support—but it's not like, since we did GTA IV, this game would take five minutes.

Did you always know you'd use the touch-screen to complement the main gameplay as opposed to using it as the primary control device?
No, but it became very clear early on that the best way it was going to work well was by controlling the cars with the buttons rather than the stylus. Obviously the bulk of the game is controlling the cars or walking on foot outside of the cars. The challenge with the minigames was how to make them work contextually as you seamlessly move between the two screens. I think one of the things at the heart of a GTA game from a design standpoint is the idea of seamlessness between mission and non-mission, between this part of the world and that part of the world—the most you ever get is a tiny load when the map can't support it, but otherwise they're very seamless games.

Here, you're introducing minigames that could in some ways represent a barrier. So the challenge was making the movement between the two moments in the game—say, from hotwiring a car to driving the car—feel very seamless. I was sometimes skeptical when some of the guys were suggesting it, thinking it couldn't be fun. But when I finally saw it, I thought it was brilliant. And because it's on a DS, you're not really noticing it. We could've done it another way to make the car feel fun, but [the buttons] felt more natural.

Yeah, when I drove off a bridge into the water and had to break the windshield to escape, it felt like such a subtle but great thing.
It's cool, isn't it? You can't really fail it, but it makes you realize, this is how the game's going to work. So it's a tutorial buried into a fun bit of story that's really nice and easy, and you get your head around what the game is.

The game feels more arcade-y and lighter than other games.
Yeah, more so than GTA IV, and maybe even Vice City Stories, which was a bit darker as well. This is certainly a cynical game—it's not like it's gone soft. It's gone inevitably and slightly more two-dimensional because of the isometric viewpoint. We always try and set the story and characters so they match the rest of the graphics. And they match the feeling that driving the cars give you, if you know what I mean. Thematically it won't be as heavy as GTA IV because it can't look as heavy. We always try and make it so the story matches the way the whole game feels, and we've done it this time as well. And I think it works.

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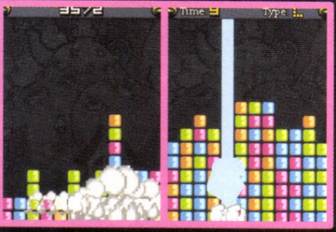

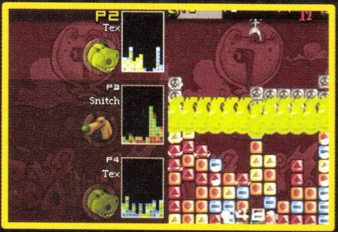

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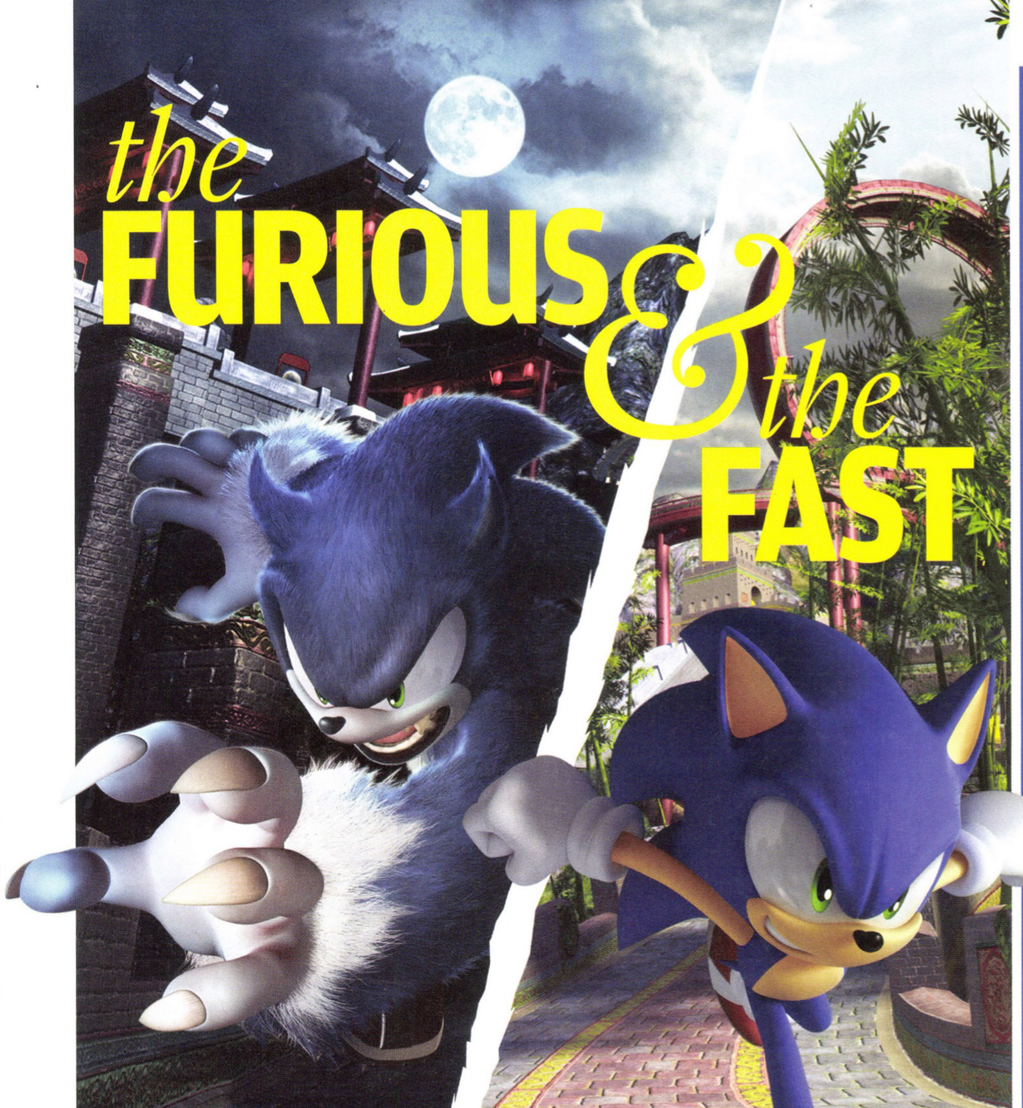
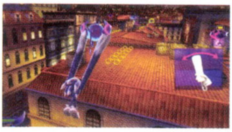


the FURIOUS & the FAST

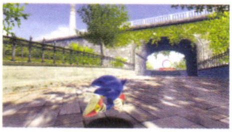
Sonic's speedy by day and savage by night in **Sonic Unleashed** for Wii.

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN

When Sega announced Sonic Unleashed, we knew it was going to be something special. After all, it blends the 3-D action that the hedgehog's been known for as of late with classic-style 2-D gameplay that hasn't been seen in a console Sonic game for more than a decade.



The European-style city of Spogonia plays and feels very different during the day [below] and night [above].



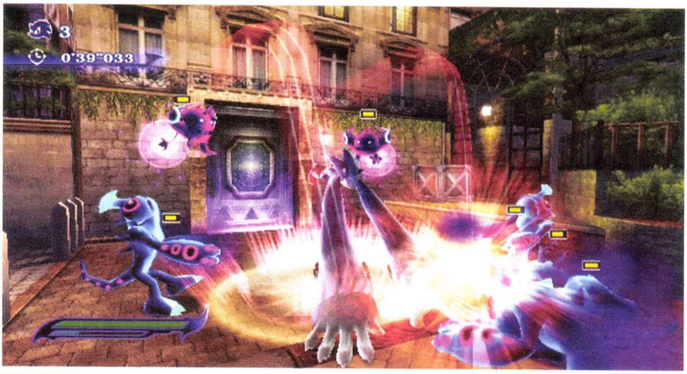
But one of gaming's recent worst-kept secrets was that there was more to Sonic Unleashed than initially met the eye. As producer Yoshihisa Hashimoto said in our interview in Vol. 231, "One thing I can tell you is that there is a clear difference between day and night stages." But now the cat's out of the bag—or, to be more precise, the wolf is. During Sonic Unleashed's nighttime stages, Sonic transforms into a ferocious Werehog form, and the game evolves from a lightning-quick platformer to a full-blown beat-'em-up.

The reason for Sonic's unusual metamorphosis is explained during the game's incredible CG intro. This visual tour de force features Sonic facing Dr. Robotnik (aka Eggman) in a climactic outer-space battle sequence in which Sonic uses the power of the Chaos Emeralds to transform into Super Sonic and kick Robotnik's ample butt, leaving the not-so-good doctor begging for forgiveness. It's a ruse, of course—Robotnik traps Sonic and sucks the energy right out of the Chaos Emeralds, then uses the power to fire a superweapon into the planet below. The resultant impact releases an evil entity that was trapped within the planet, while the forces at work also wreak havoc on Sonic himself. The normally cheery hedgehog transforms into a menacing Werehog: bigger and more muscular, with fangs, claws, hornlike ears, and a fine coat of blue-and-white fur. Perhaps because having a stronger and more dangerous Sonic onboard his ship isn't the best idea, Robotnik boots Sonic out the airlock, and so begins Sonic's quest to restore both the planet and himself.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

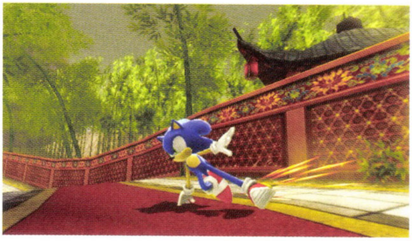
As the term Werehog suggests, Sonic's transformation takes place only at night. Sega hasn't revealed exactly why that's the case, but it means that during the game's daytime stages Sonic is his usual speedy self. By moving Sonic with the nunchuk's Control Stick and jumping with the A Button on the remote, you'll guide the hero through blistering-fast levels. A good portion of the stages we've seen take place from a behind-the-back perspective (similar to Sonic and the Secret Rings or the upcoming Sonic and the Black Knight), which gives you a chance to try out some of Sonic's new moves, such as the quick step (dodge left or right by holding B and tapping the Control Stick in the desired direction) and a new drift mechanic that lets you earn bonuses by holding B or Z to whip around tight turns. But within any given daytime stage, the action will shift seamlessly to a side-view 2-D-style perspective and let you kick it old-school as you boost on conveyor belts, slide along rails, bounce off of springboards, and collect seemingly endless streams of rings.

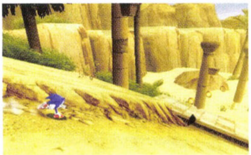
No matter whether you're viewing the action in 2-D or 3-D, you'll get to take out enemies using Sonic's trademark homing dash attack by shaking the Wii remote. Shaking the remote also lets you initiate a speed boost that's powered by a gauge at the bottom of the screen. Collecting

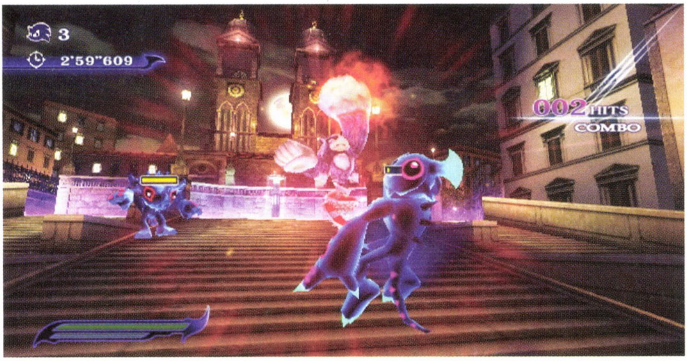


[Above] Is it Sonic or is it the love child of Beast and Mr. Fantastic? With his dense blue fur and stretchy arms, it's hard to tell.

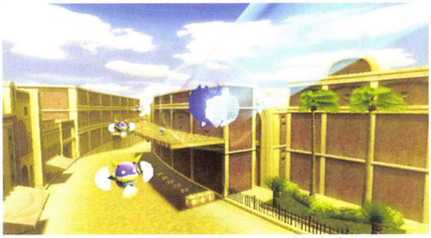
[Right] The production values of Sonic Unleashed are top-notch. Sega's even rolled out the red carpet for him!







[Above] Werehog Sonic socks a baddie with a searing uppercut. You can almost hear him yell, "This is what I call Blast Processing, fool!"



rings, beating baddies, and successfully earning drift bonuses lets you refill and expand the boost gauge, thus allowing you to chain together an explosive cavalcade of action, platforming, and speed.

The daytime stages we've seen thus far reveal a diverse selection of gorgeous locales, such as the Rooftop Run of the lush European-flavored city of Spogonia and a sandy, oasis-filled desert known as Shamar. The red-and-gold Dragon Road of the Chinese-themed Chun-Nan area is another eye-opener; it boasts stone bridges, ornate pagodas, vast mountains in the background, and even a section where Sonic demonstrates his skill by running on water. Better yet—although Sonic Unleashed is coming to multiple systems, the Wii version offers unique level designs you won't see anywhere else.

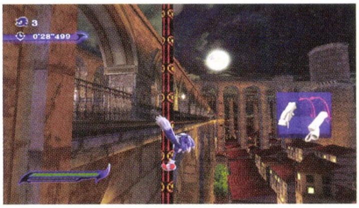
WILD NIGHTS

Nighttime, however, is when things really get interesting: Sonic's Werehog form emerges, and the Blue Blur becomes the Blue Brute. Sonic gains a health bar, his breakneck speed slows to a more-deliberate pace (Werehog Sonic isn't exactly slow, but he lumbers kind of like a gorilla), and straightforward levels give way to stages with a greater emphasis on nonlinearity and puzzle solving.

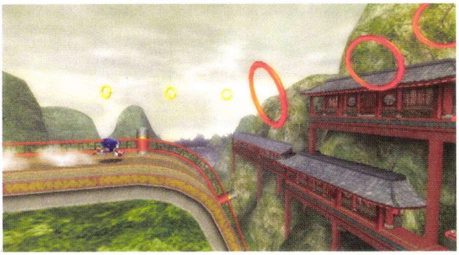
But the main focus of the night stages is on just one thing—beating the stuffing out of your enemies. Simple swings of the remote (for Sonic's right hand) or nunchuk (for his left) dish out damage to foes, pressing Z lets you block, and by chaining together combos and mixing in advanced moves (simultaneously swinging the remote and nunchuk up, down, or toward each other) you can really lay the hurt on the evil entity's minions. You can also literally send your foes flying by using the B Button to grab and toss them, either into the distance or into each other. Collecting red orbs as you explore the nighttime stages lets you unlock new moves (such as the Were-Hammer, Were-Wallop, Were-Rush, Earthshaker, and Beatdown), and when you want to really get nasty, you can press the C Button to activate Unleashed mode: a temporary powered-up state in which you gain new attacks and take less damage from your enemies.

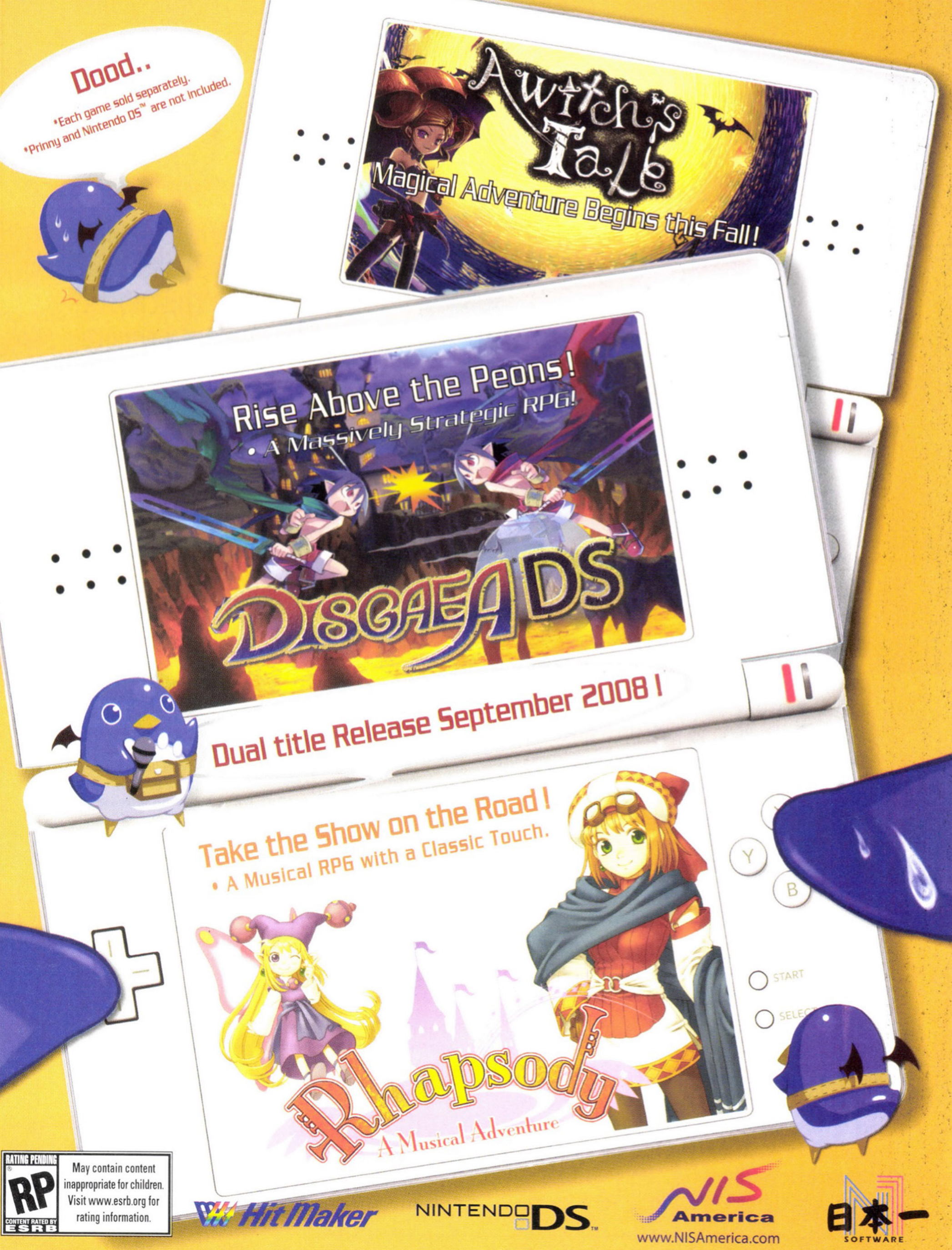
Sonic's buff, burly arms are good for more than clobbering killer bees, dark bats, and other enemies, though—they actually stretch like rubber, allowing you to grab ledges and pull yourself up. You can even grab and dangle off of some enemies in midair, then wave the remote to swing back and forth like a pendulum before launching yourself to a nearby platform. As a Werehog, you get to use the Wii controls in numerous other creative ways, such as climbing poles by lifting the remote and nunchuk alternately, and raising a heavy gate by yanking up with both controllers. Sometimes you'll have to use brains as well as brawn—for example, lifting a crate onto a switchplate or using Sonic's aforementioned acrobatic skills to find energy keys to unlock a door and proceed through the area.

In addition to the speed-oriented daytime stages and combat-heavy nighttime stages, Sonic Unleashed will feature exploration-based hub areas (although Sega promises that you won't have to spend much time in them if you'd rather get straight to the action)—just one more part of the equation that is so far adding up to one of Sonic's most promising, robust, and innovative console offerings in a while. Prepare to unleash the beast when the game arrives on Wii this November.



[Left] Climbing poles is one of several gesture-based moves you can use to your advantage.

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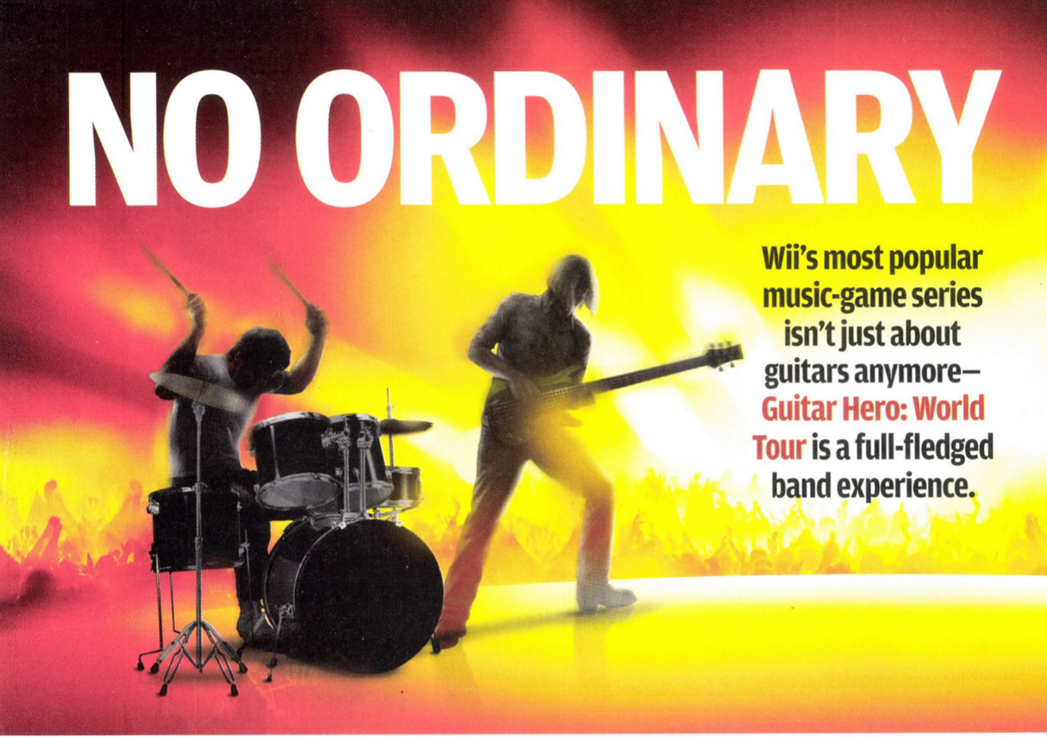


Wii's most popular music-game series isn't just about guitars anymore—Guitar Hero: World Tour is a full-fledged band experience.

EVEN PEOPLE WHO WOULDN'T consider themselves gamers are ready and willing to pick up a guitar controller and start jamming, because Guitar Hero makes it easy to feel like an axe-shredding rock star. But as the series continues, there's the danger the franchise will become stale—not to mention the looming threat from rival music games. Enter Guitar Hero: World Tour, a Guitar Hero with singing and drumming. Comparisons to competitor Rock Band are inevitable, but World Tour takes the band concept a step further by allowing you to unleash your inner musician. "You gotta make your own kind of music," Mama Cass once sang, and you can do exactly that with World Tour's Music Studio mode. (You can't really "sing your own special song," however, since the game doesn't allow for lyrics in the user-created tracks.) It's an ambitious idea, especially on Wii, but publisher Activision and developer Vicarious Visions are up to the task, as we learned by chatting with Vicarious Visions CEO Karthik Bala about making Guitar Hero: World Tour for Wii.

NINTENDO POWER Since this is the first time drums and a microphone have been added to the series, how did you go about incorporating these peripherals into the Guitar Hero experience? Why did you decide to add these peripherals in the first place?

KARTHIK BALA We really listened to the gamers who bought Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock on Wii, and they wanted the drum and microphone controllers. It also really seemed like the natural evolution of this type of game. When looking at designing the new peripherals, we wanted to make sure we adhered to Nintendo's Wii-remote standards in adding the drum controllers. RedOctane really focused on making the best music peripherals on the market. It's amazing really.

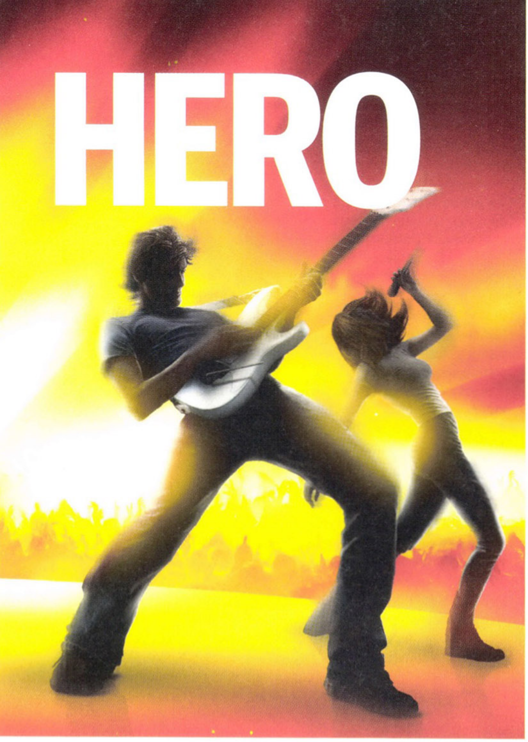
The cool thing is that for everyone who bought Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock, the previous Guitar Hero guitar controllers work just fine in Guitar Hero: World Tour. So if they just want more great guitar gameplay, they can buy the standalone game or guitar bundle. Or if they want the complete band experience, they can buy the full band kit.

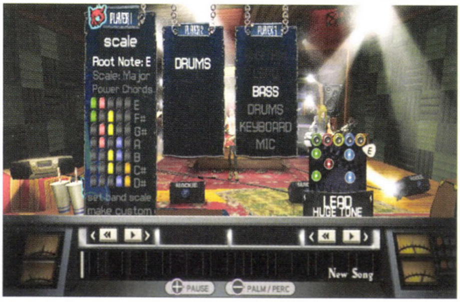
Has the guitar hardware changed at all since Guitar Hero III? Will the new hardware still use the Wii remote?

Yes, the new peripherals use the Wii remote. The new guitar controller has a great touch-pad slider, which introduces new mechanics into the game, as well as some really cool controls in the

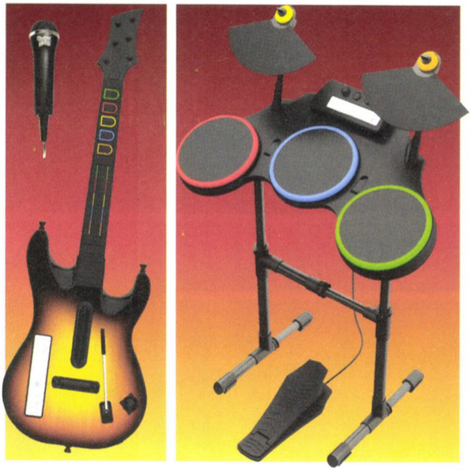
BY JUSTIN CHENG

HERO





[Above] With World Tour's Music Studio mode, you can make virtually any song you want. We can't wait to try re-creating some classic video game tunes. [Below] You've got some new instruments to play with, but luckily your old Wii guitars work, too.



Music Studio. There have been a lot of subtle mechanical changes made—longer strum and whammy bars to name a couple—based on feedback from gamers. My personal favorite is the new palm mute button—it sits right at the base of your palm and can be used to activate star power, as well as in Music Studio and Mii Freestyle to create cool and authentic sounds.

One of the big new features is the create-a-rocker mode—will this be in the Wii version? Can you use Miis instead if you want? Will the familiar Guitar Hero characters return as well?

Absolutely! There's a robust Rock Star Creator mode in the game, where you can customize the look, outfits, special animation and even a band-logo creator. Your band logo will appear on banners in the venue and you can put them on a T-shirt for your character to wear. All the favorite GH characters are returning plus a few new ones. The Miis are also debuting in Guitar Hero, in an exclusive new mode called Mii Freestyle.

Mii Freestyle—what is it?

Mii Freestyle is a creative and fun mode that lets you freely create music in-game using the guitar and drum controllers. It's for both one and two players to improvise and create their own rock songs in a very simple and intuitive way. You can use the guitar controller, the drum controller, or even the Wii remote and nunchuk to play air drums in this mode. You don't have to know a thing about music or music theory to sound good—in fact you don't even have to be that good at Guitar Hero!

273585
x4
x3

Guitar Hero III was pretty darn difficult at times. Has the difficulty level been altered at all in World Tour?

The difficulty level has been balanced quite a bit. We've added a new beginner level to help new players get accustomed to strumming and drumming. We also have the ability for players to ratchet up or down the difficulty during a career progression if they are really stuck on a particular song. This way, their progress towards unlocking all the songs isn't hindered if they just want all the songs to play, regardless of difficulty level. We know that there are players of all skill levels who play Guitar Hero, and we've made sure that the game is both accessible and challenging.

Has Wii's limited storage capacity affected your downloadable-content (DLC) plans? Will you be able to use SD cards to save your downloaded songs?

No, the onboard Wii System Memory has not hindered our DLC features. Everyone knows the Wii doesn't have a hard drive, but that isn't stopping us from offering DLC. It's a feature that so many Wii consumers want—and deserve.

Players can either download songs from the in-game Music Store to the Wii system memory or download and store them on SD cards. Saving on SD cards is the way to go if you plan on downloading a lot of songs. The Wii system memory is then used as a "content cache." This means you only need to have the free space for one song in the Wii system memory (about 200 blocks). All songs you have downloaded (including those on your SD card) will appear on your set list. You can choose to play the songs just like any other song. The game automatically transfers the song to Wii system memory, plays the song, and deletes it when you're done. Then the next song is queued up and the process can repeat. It's completely transparent to players. The SD card just becomes an expansion of the Wii system memory, and it all happens pretty quickly.

It was a very challenging feature to architect and implement, but we really wanted to go all out because we feel that the Wii community deserves it.

How does the Band Career mode work? Will you be able to play it online with your friends?

The career mode is now completely nonlinear. You no longer play through the game in succession, as you have multiple gigs available at any given time. This way, if there's ever a song that you really don't want to play, you don't have to, as you can unlock additional tracks by completing the other available gigs.

Gamers can start playing at home with a full band, continue playing with one or two other gamers, and then finish online if they leave.

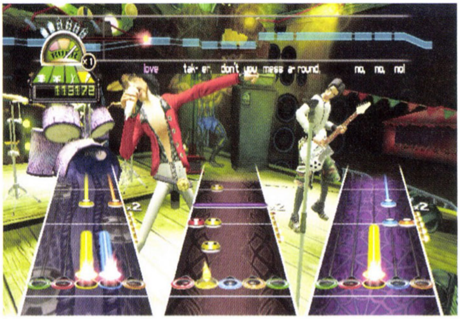
Additionally, the cash system has been overhauled completely so that players get cash based on their own performance (using the whammy bar on every sustain, hitting velocity-sensitive drum notes harder, etc.) instead of getting a fixed percentage of the whole.

What other online features will be included in the game?

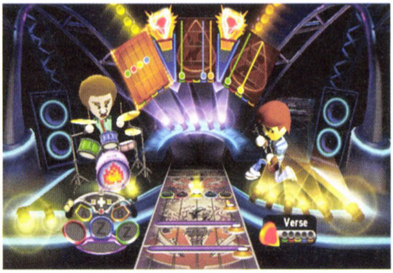
We've got all the standard game modes that you'd expect for online play—cooperative and competitive modes with up to eight players competing at once in Battle of the Bands.

Additionally, the Music Studio has an incredibly deep music-creation system that players can use to create their own songs—which are then playable in-game if you'd like. Perhaps the best part about this is that you can upload your creations to GHTunes and share them with other players. You can check out other players' creations online, download them to your Wii, and play them in-game at any difficulty level.

People seem to be split on the Battle mode. Will the mode be returning? If so, will the mode undergo any changes?



[Right] The Wii-exclusive Mii Freestyle mode makes it easy to just pick up your instruments and start jamming.



THE TRACKS

Guitar Hero: World Tour will feature 85 songs when you get the game, all of them master tracks from the original artists. Activision and Vicarious Visions want to keep some a surprise, but below are all the songs we know about so far.

311 "Beautiful Disaster"
Airbourne "Too Much, Too Young, Too Fast"
Anouk "Good God"
At the Drive-in "One Armed Scissor"
Beastie Boys "No Sleep Till Brooklyn"
Beatsteaks "Hail to the Freaks"
Billy Idol "Rebel Yell"
Blink-182 "Dammit"
Blondie "One Way or Another"
Black Label Society "Stillborn"
Bob Seger "Hollywood Nights"
Bon Jovi "Livin' on a Prayer"
Black Rebel Motorcycle Club "Weapon of Choice"
Bullet For My Valentine "Scream Aim Fire"
Creedence Clearwater Revival "Up Around The Bend"
Coldplay "Shiver"
The Cult "Love Removal Machine"
Dinosaur Jr. "Feel the Pain"
The Doors "Love Me Two Times"
The Eagles "Hotel California"
The Enemy "Aggro"
Fleetwood Mac "Go Your Own Way"
Foo Fighters "Everlong"
The Guess Who "American Woman"
Hushpuppies "You're Gonna Say Yeah"
Interpol "Obstacle 1"
Jimi Hendrix "Purple Haze Live"
Jimi Hendrix "Wind Cries Mary"
Kent "Vinternoll 2"
Korn "Freak on a Leash"
Lacuna Coil "Our Truth"
Lenny Kravitz "Are You Gonna Go My Way"
Linkin Park "What I've Done"
The Living End "Prisoner of Society"
Los Lobos "La Bamba"
Lost Prophets "Rooftops"
Mars Volta "L'Via L'Viaquez"
Metallica "Trapped under Ice"
Michael Jackson "Beat It"
Modest Mouse "Float On"
Motorhead "Overkill"
Negramaro "Nuvole e Lenzuola"
Nirvana "About a Girl"
No Doubt "Spiderwebs"
Oasis "Some Might Say"
Ozzy Osbourne "Crazy Train"
Ozzy Osbourne "Mr. Crowley"
Paramore "Misery Business"
Pat Benatar "Heartbreaker"
Radio Futura "Escuela De Calor"
REM "The One I Love"
Silversun Pickups "Lazy Eye"
Stuck in the Sound "Toy Boy"
Sublime "Santeria"
Survivor "Eye of the Tiger"
System of a Down "BYOB"
Tokio Hotel "Monsoon"
Van Halen "Hot for Teacher"
Willie Nelson "On the Road Again"

NINTENDO DS™

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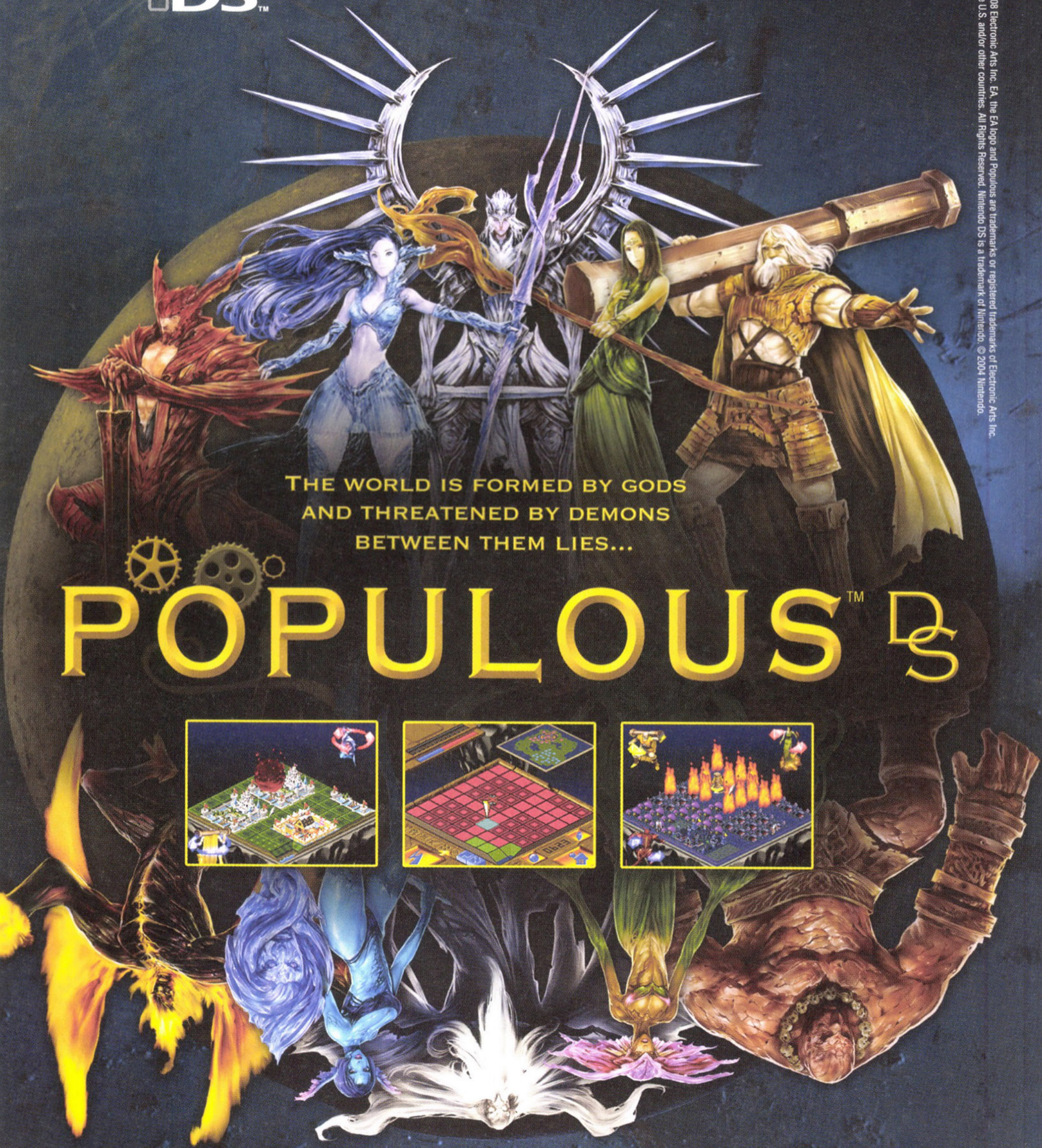
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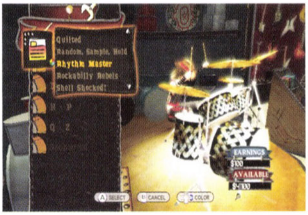
We have received a wide range of reactions to Battle mode on Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock. Some people really loved it, and while it does return for Guitar Hero: World Tour, we've tweaked it a little to improve some of the areas that people didn't care for. Gamers will still run into boss battles along the way, but they no longer have the power-ups (attacks) during the boss battles. Instead gamers are trading riffs back and forth with the bosses.

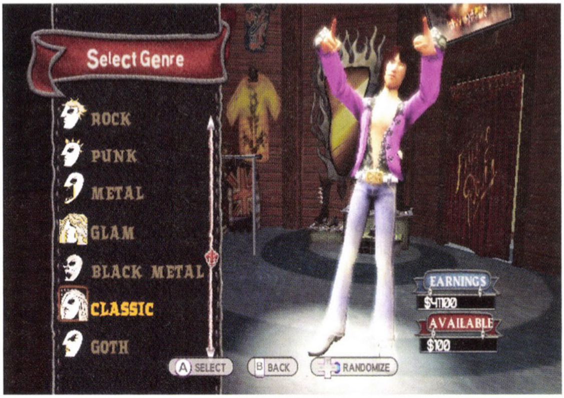
We did receive a lot of positive feedback from people who enjoyed playing Battle mode, so we have kept that in there, pretty much as it was in Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock, for that section of the audience.

How did you decide which songs to use in the game?

There is an extensive process that goes into track selection for a game like Guitar Hero: World Tour. With the way that music games have started to shape the music industry, we have had a lot of amazing artists approaching us with great, innovative ways to include their music. In addition, these rock 'n' roll legends are also allowing us to use their likenesses in-game as well as inspiring new venues. We obviously strive to provide players with the most comprehensive set list that spans different genres and multiple generations, which we've always delivered. With the addition of the new peripherals and the evolved gameplay, we were looking for not only tracks with killer guitar solos, but songs with the whole package—great guitar, dynamic drums and vicious vocals. With over 85 on-disc tracks, we're really excited to ship with the largest set list of all time, and we think fans of the franchise will be really pleased with our choices.

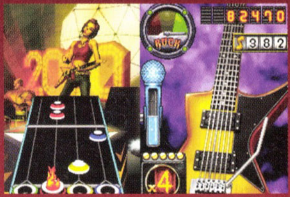


There's a lot of customization in World Tour, from the instruments you play to your rock star alter-ego.



HANDHELD HERO

World Tour isn't the only Guitar Hero coming out this year—DS owners will get even more music gaming goodness with Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades. We chatted with Karthik Bala about the handheld sequel.



NINTENDO POWER What does the "Decades" subtitle mean?

KARTHIK BALA Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades is themed around music from the '70s, '80s, '90s, and today. The venues are set through the course of music history, with characters in outfits and thematic elements signifying each era along with, of course, some great tunes from each decade.

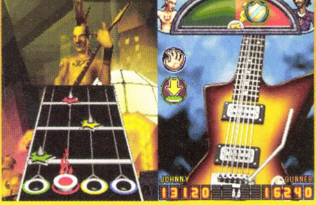
Streaming songs between Decades and the original On Tour—how did this idea come about?

The idea of streaming songs between different versions of a game really came about during the development of On Tour. Because each game cartridge can hold only a limited number of songs, we wanted to release multiple iterations, like new albums, in the future. Chances are you may run into friends who may have different "albums" and we thought it would be great if we could have multiplayer between different versions of the game. This type of innovation required streaming songs to one another in real time. It is a big technical achievement for us—no one had attempted anything like this before on the DS.

It's funny how we're on our 5th year of development on the system, and the DS continues to surprise us with what it can do! The song streaming is going to allow players to introduce new songs to one another and enjoy a broader library of content. We're really excited about that.

Some criticized the track list in the first game—what kinds of songs can we expect to see in Decades?

It's hard to please everyone's music tastes, especially with limited space on the cartridge. Because of our improved compression technology, we were able to fit 28 master tracks, with no covers, on the cart for Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades. With this title, we have a little bit of everything for all different types of music lovers. The theme has allowed us to get some great rock from the '70s on. For fans of classic rock, there are some great songs from bands like Lynyrd Skynyrd, Boston, and REM. For fans of modern rock, we have Foo Fighters, Smashing Pumpkins, and Red Hot Chili Peppers.



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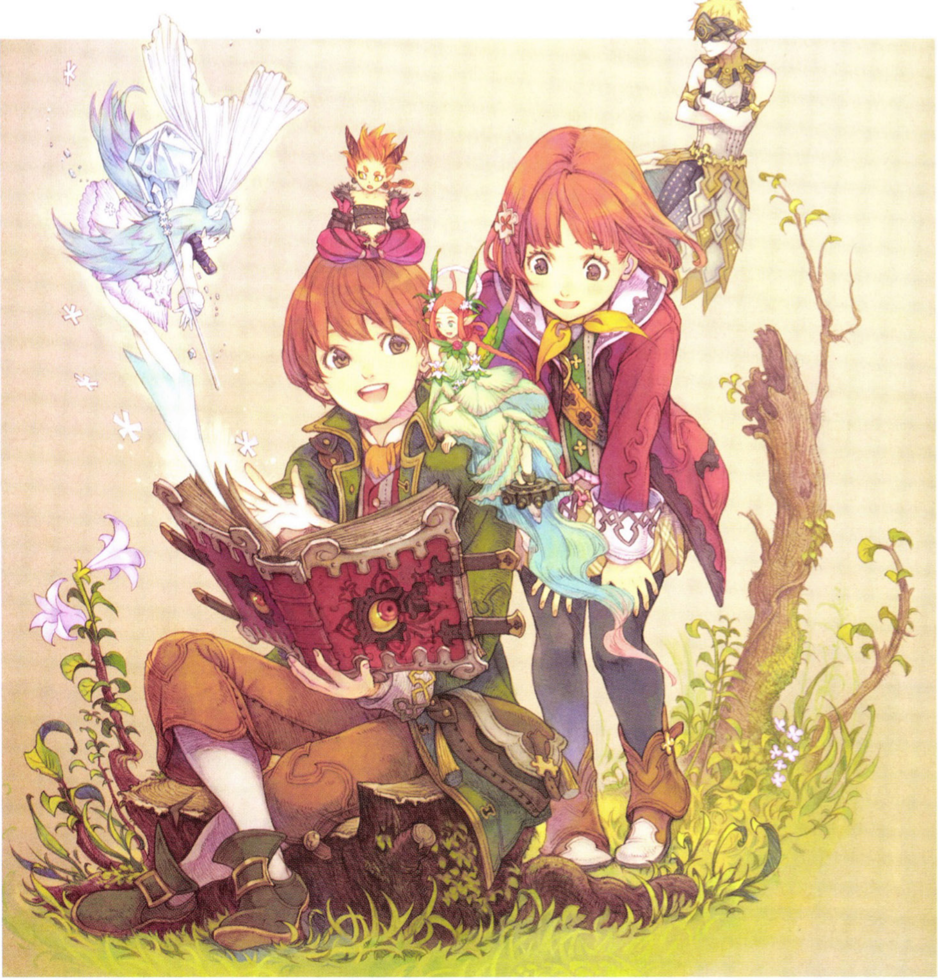


LIVE BY THE CODE, DIE BY THE CODE'

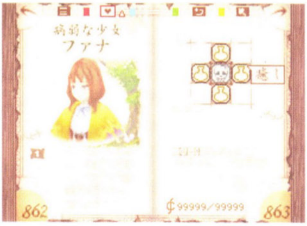
Crack XSEED's upcoming Avalon Code, and the world is your plaything. For as long as it lasts, anyway.

BY CASEY LOE

After weeks of dreaming about the end of the world, a divine voice has called you to action. No, not to save it—the Powers That Be have apparently decided to take the tax write-off on this world and start over with a new one. Instead your job is to travel the doomed land and determine what's worth saving. To do so, you'll wield a massive tome known as the Book of Prophecy, which can reveal the secret codes that compose the essence of any creature, plant, or object—just as soon as you give it one good whack with the book.

Being the Noah to a new world does have its perks. Once you've recorded something's code, you can screw around with it, moving one object's properties to another. "For example," explains producer Yoshifumi Hashimoto of Marvelous Entertainment, "there is a girl with a terminal illness. You can use the Book of Prophecy to remove her sickness." And once you've isolated that part of her code, you can then slap it onto a previously indestructible enemy, weakening him severely.

Avalon Code's interface is simultaneously more bizarre and more intuitive than you might expect. The DS's top screen is pure action-RPG, where your hero battles enemies, charms townsfolk, and looks for new things to scan with the Book of Prophecy. The lower screen is the Book of Prophecy itself, a tome with well over a thousand pages (and, thankfully, an index for quick navigation). Once you whack a target, its profile appears across two pages of the book, with a name and picture on the left and the code on the right. The codes are purely visual, appearing as a grid filled with icons that represent the objects' fundamental essence. A weapon is metal with maybe a touch of death, while a blazing crimson flower is pure fire at its core. Things get really surreal when you start scanning characters and learn that the town guardsman is four parts justice and two parts dog, and that your snobby rich-girl neighbor is four parts cat, four parts sun, and one part lightning.

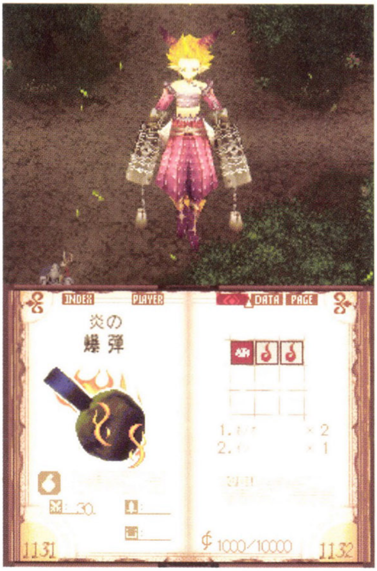


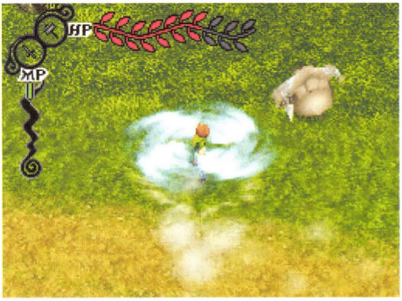
Until you learn how to remove the sickness from Fana's code, you'll have to surround it with healing icons to keep her alive.

Tweaking the codes is a simple matter of dragging an icon out of a code and onto a little clipboard. Grab the darkness out of a local emo poet's code and drag it onto the code of a loaf of bread, and that entry's name and art change to represent the newly created Bread of Darkness. There isn't much point to befouling the fundamental concept of bread, but there is plenty of value in, say, dragging the fire out of a flower and onto your sword, creating a flaming blade that can deal double damage to enemies who are weak to flame. And if you run into an enemy who is resistant to fire, no bother—you can open up your Book of Prophecy to yank that attribute right out of his code.

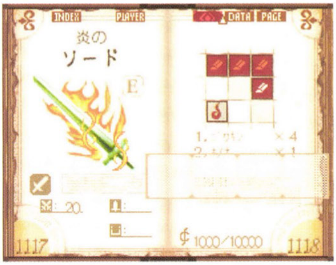
LOVE AND WAR

After coming up with the basic idea for the game, Hashimoto took it to Matrix Software, the developer best known for the exceptional DS remakes of Final Fantasy III and IV. Needless to say, Avalon Code looks impressive. "Having a lot of experience creating 3-D on the DS hardware from multiple past titles, we believe that we know how to





You can wield a blade in each hand, and hold down the attack button of either weapon to charge up its individual special attack.



optimize 3-D models to their fullest extent given the specs of the DS," says codirector Keizo Kato. It's no idle boast; the character models and environments are packed with detail, and the game runs smooth and steady, even at this early stage.

Matrix has a long history of making original action-RPGs, including the PlayStation's Alundra series and the PlayStation 2's Dual Hearts. But whereas those games were famous for their challenging puzzles, Matrix is toning down that aspect for Avalon Code. "This game is a lot more battle-oriented," explains codirector Takahiro Matsumoto. "But we also like to think of the Book of Prophecy and the system of codes as one giant puzzle."

While the Book of Prophecy is entirely stylus-controlled, Avalon Code's battle system makes use of nearly every button on the DS. A pair of weapons, the Book of Prophecy, and a magic spell are all mapped to the face buttons, and you can roll out of danger with a tap of the R Button. Players can charge special attacks by holding down a button, and those who can juggle foes with quick dual sword strikes will see one of the game's coolest effects—with each juggle the camera pulls farther back, eventually revealing the entire planet.

While Avalon Code is packed with ambitious new ideas, Hashimoto has also incorporated a favorite theme from his previous titles in the Harvest Moon and Rune Factory series. "Adding romantic subplots to a game gives the main character some motivation like, 'I'll come back to this town for her,' instead of just blindly fighting everything in his path," says Hashimoto, explaining how romance finds its way into all of his games. "Otherwise, even the inhabitants of a fantasy world might feel like sleeping in instead of going out to fight." Avalon Code allows players to choose either a male or female hero, and there are plenty of eligible NPCs for each character to woo.

HOW THE WORLD ENDS

Of course, it's best not to get too attached to your romantic partner, as he or she is only going to end up being purged by the impending flames of Armageddon. Or maybe not. "Whether or not the world will end depends on the main character and their Book of Prophecy," says Hashimoto. "The player will select the things that will carry over to the new world, so we'd like you to see for yourself how it will turn out." He won't spoil the specifics, but does promise that players "can take a glimpse of the new world that they've created in the very end."

With its twinned themes of world destruction and world creation, and a game system that allows you to rewrite the fundamental rules of matter, Avalon Code is unlike any action-RPG we've ever seen. We won't find out how it comes together until next year, but an early whack with our Book of Prophecy has revealed Avalon Code to be two parts daring, three parts madness, and a whole lot of awesome.

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6 holes (octave + 4), includes Extended Range Songbook
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(with necklace and songbook) $24.95

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Fits all ocarinas $5.95

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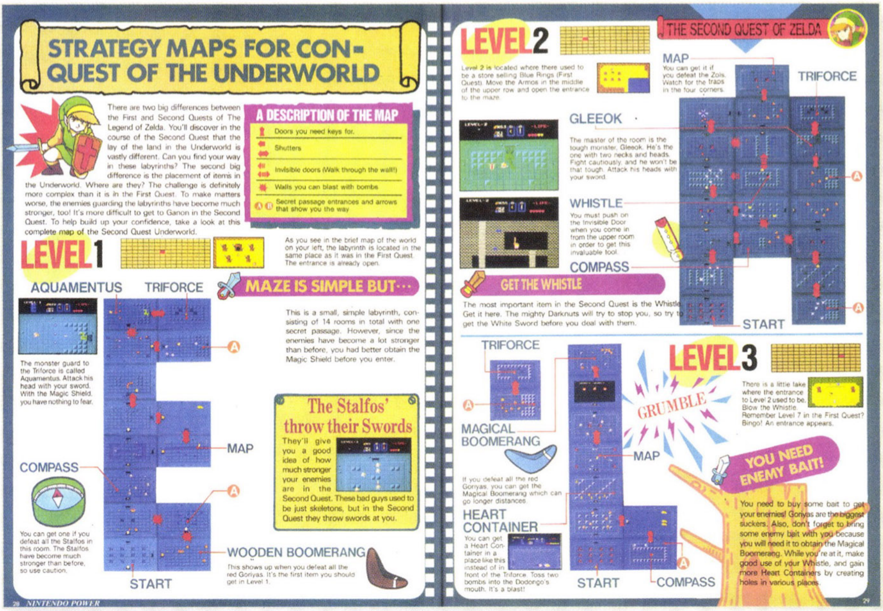
Feature Presentation

FEATURE ARTICLES are to the magazine world what big budget films are to Hollywood; they are meant to be eye-catching, informative, entertaining, and sometimes provocative articles that dig deeply into a subject. Evolving from colorful preview and walk-through articles in the early issues, Nintendo Power's features now cover a wide range of gaming topics including technology, trends, events, people, and individual game titles. Such a diversity of subject matter calls for a variety of unique design and editorial approaches, making feature articles particularly memorable. For this month's stroll down memory lane, we'll revisit a few examples of the different kinds of features found in NP's pages and a few of my personal favorites.

BY SCOTT PELLAND



STRATEGY MAPS FOR CONQUEST OF THE UNDERWORLD

There are two big differences between the First and Second Quests of The Legend of Zelda. You'll discover in the course of the Second Quest that the lay of the land in the Underworld is vastly different. Can you find your way in these labyrinths? The second big difference is the placement of items in the Underworld. Where are they? The challenge is definitely more complex than it is in the First Quest. To make matters worse, the enemies guarding the labyrinths have become much stronger, too! It's more difficult to get to Ganon in the Second Quest. To help build up your confidence, take a look at this complete map of the Second Quest Underworld.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE MAP

	Doors you need keys for.
	Shutters
	Invisible doors (Walk through the wall!)
	Walls you can blast with bombs
Ⓐ Ⓑ	Secret passage entrances and arrows that show you the way

LEVEL 1

As you see in the brief map of the world on your left, the labyrinth is located in the same place as it was in the First Quest. The entrance is already open.

AQUAMENTUS

The monster guard to the Triforce is called Aquamentus. Attack his head with your sword. With the Magic Shield, you have nothing to fear.

TRIFORCE

Ⓐ

MAP

COMPASS

You can get one if you defeat all the Stalfos in this room. The Stalfos have become much stronger than before, so use caution.

START

WOODEN BOOMERANG

This shows up when you defeat all the red Goriyas. It's the first item you should get in Level 1.

MAZE IS SIMPLE BUT···

This is a small, simple labyrinth, consisting of 14 rooms in total with one secret passage. However, since the enemies have become a lot stronger than before, you had better obtain the Magic Shield before you enter.

The Stalfos' throw their Swords

They'll give you a good idea of how much stronger your enemies are in the Second Quest. These bad guys used to be just skeletons, but in the Second Quest they throw swords at you.

28 NINTENDO POWER

THE SECOND QUEST OF ZELDA

LEVEL 2

Level 2 is located where there used to be a store selling Blue Rings (First Quest). Move the Armos in the middle of the upper row and open the entrance to the maze.

MAP

You can get it if you defeat the Zols. Watch for the traps in the four corners.

TRIFORCE

GLEEOK

The master of the room is the tough monster, Gleeok. He's the one with two necks and heads. Fight cautiously, and he won't be that tough. Attack his heads with your sword.

WHISTLE

You must push on the Invisible Door when you come in from the upper room in order to get this invaluable tool.

COMPASS

Ⓐ

START

GET THE WHISTLE

The most important item in the Second Quest is the Whistle. Get it here. The mighty Darknuts will try to stop you, so try to get the White Sword before you deal with them.

LEVEL 3

There is a little lake where the entrance to Level 2 used to be. Blow the Whistle. Remember Level 7 in the First Quest? Bingo! An entrance appears.

GRUMBLE

TRIFORCE

Ⓐ

MAGICAL BOOMERANG

If you defeat all the red Goriyas, you can get the Magical Boomerang which can go longer distances.

HEART CONTAINER

You can get a Heart Container in a place like this instead of in front of the Triforce. Toss two bombs into the Dodongo's mouth. It's a blast!

MAP

START

COMPASS

YOU NEED ENEMY BAIT!

You need to buy some bait to get your enemies! Goriyas are the biggest suckers. Also, don't forget to bring some enemy bait with you because you will need it to obtain the Magical Boomerang. While you're at it, make good use of your Whistle, and gain more Heart Containers by creating holes in various places.

29

↑ Imagine that you've spent weeks humping through Hyrule, knocking off Octoroks, solving countless puzzles, dodging Wallmasters, and then ending Ganon's reign of terror in the battle to end all video game battles (circa 1987), only to learn that the game has a second, even tougher quest. Is a hero's work never done? Fortunately for those players, Nintendo Power was founded with a sense of *noblesse oblige*, and we came to the rescue in the very first issue with complete maps and tips. Strategy features were an NP staple for years, but perhaps none of them were received with as much gratitude as this first one.

GAME BOY

GAME BOY. WHAT IS IT?

It's All In Your Hands!

GAME BOY

All the Power of the NES, Pocket-Size

Video Link for a Two-Player Challenge!

Battery Indicator Light
Rechargeable Battery Pack/ AC Adapter Connection
Power
Game Pak
Video Link Cable Connection
Contrast
Volume
Controls
Speaker
Headphone Jack
Battery Cover
What the... Hey!
All Right!

← I can still recall the excitement I felt when Nintendo Power introduced Game Boy to the world with a little help from Howard, Nester, and Tetris-creator Alexey Pajitnov. Wow, a portable video game system! So what if it didn't really fit in a pocket or the gray-scale graphics were marred by motion-blur? It was still revolutionary. NP went on to introduce all Nintendo's subsequent consoles and handheld systems with lots of hoopla, but nothing can touch Game Boy's industry-changing impact. Suddenly, there was a new kid in town.

OF NINTENDO POWER

#10 IN OUR YEARLONG CELEBRATION OF NINTENDO POWER'S CLASSIC MOMENTS

DOOM 64

ONE MARINE FIGHTS AGAINST IMPOSSIBLE ODDS IN MIDWAY'S DOOM 64. IT'S A TRIUMPH OF ART AND BLOOD, AND IT'S AN ALL-NEW DOOM ADVENTURE.

DOOM VITAL STATS

↑ When it came time to explore the world's first FPS megahit—Doom—with a preview of Doom 64, we chose to present the game's M-rated action as an eyewitness account complete with dramatic narrative devices and a space marine-issue communications gizmo with monster radar capabilities, thus qualifying it as a *creature feature*.

↓ It's hard to believe that there was a time when the NP staff thought it was necessary to spend editorial space legitimizing RPGs, but how else to explain this article, which even uses graphs to support the claim that RPGs (and RPG adventures such as Mana) provide long-lasting fun. Although the article hammered home its theme with all the subtlety of a whack-a-mole game, eventually the North American gamer took notice and embraced the genre. You're welcome.

POWER EXPLORER'S REPORT

SECRET of MANA Special

EPIC ADVENTURES ARE BIG HITS

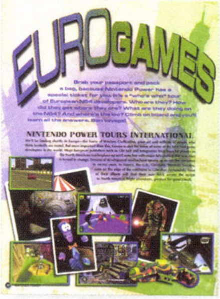
LOOK FOR LASTING APPEAL

WHAT MAKES SECRET of MANA SO COMPELLING?

OF THE JUNGLE

PLAY IT Loud

← It may come as a shock to many, but Nintendo of America's corporate marketing themes seldom impacted Nintendo Power in any lasting way. Not so with the Play It Loud campaign of 1994. Taking a page from the grunge music scene and some unconventional periodicals, such as Ray Gun magazine, NP boldly set out to confuse its readers with psychedelic imagery and text that roamed across the page like a squirrel searching for its nuts. We humbly apologize to any readers still experiencing post-Play It Loud trauma.



EUROGAMES

NINTENDO POWER TOURS INTERNATIONAL

↑ We kid our European friends not because they are short, furry, purple folk who wear funny hats and speak silly languages that make no sense, but because they create really twisted games. It's been going on for at least a decade, as is evidenced by our 1998 European tour feature, in which we brought home the news about a drunken squirrel, a Space Circus, and two (not one, but two) Ubisoft games featuring limbless heroes—Rayman and Tonic. Ten nostalgia points for anyone who remembers Tonic.

→ Senior Culinary Correspondent Chris Hoffman put his wit and personal safety on the line to bring readers one of the funniest pieces ever printed in Nintendo Power. Although NP may not have a reputation as a madcap read, most issues contain some real gut-busters, and occasional send-ups like last year's look at cooking games is definitely one of the best as well as being my personal favorite feature of all time.

Now You're Cooking with Power

THE 12-SECOND DESSERT: HERE'S HOW

Breakfast: Rice in Omelet

Lunch: Pizza

19

Power Profiles

DATE OF BIRTH
Greg: January, 1969
Ray: August, 1968

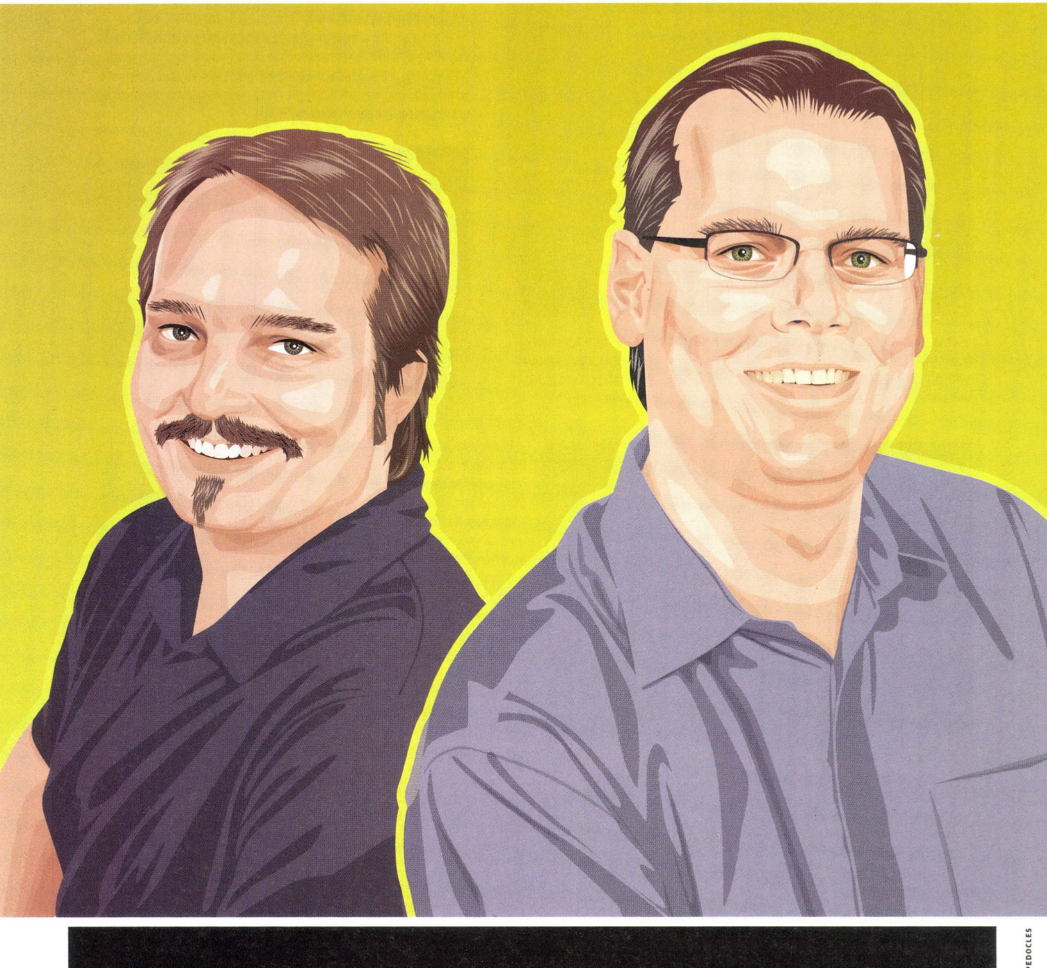
BIRTHPLACE
Both: Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

POSITION
Greg: President, BioWare
Ray: CEO, BIoWare

BEST KNOWN FOR
Promoting better storytelling in video games; letting gamers choose the dark side

FAVORITE FOOD
Both: Sushi

CURRENT PROJECTS
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood, Dragon Age



Greg Zeschuk & Ray Muzyka

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

Founded in 1995 by three medical doctors, BioWare didn't start out making video games, but it's become one of the industry's most revered studios. Two of those cofounders—Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka—continue to lead the company with their infectious passion for the medium. Their teams have long been considered premiere purveyors of Western-style role-playing games, with titles renowned for stellar writing and for giving players control over how their characters develop. The company's track record should really come as no surprise; based in Edmonton, Alberta, BioWare is consistently named as one of Canada's top employers. Though the long-independent studio was recently purchased by Electronic Arts, we have little doubt that BioWare will continue to deliver engaging, genre-defining experiences with the good doctors at the helm.

NINTENDO POWER **How did you get into the video game business?**

GREG ZESCHUK We formally started BioWare in 1995, but had been working on games and medical-education software for a few years prior to that. Our first game at BioWare was Shattered Steel on the PC (released in 1996), followed by Baldur's Gate a couple years later, in 1998. Back in those days we were the producers on our first games (myself on Shattered Steel and Ray on Baldur's Gate), but we also did a variety of other things both on our projects and at BioWare.

When you were kids, what did you want to be when you grew up?

RAY MUZYKA Both of us wanted to become medical doctors—we both graduated and practiced as physicians, Greg working as a family doctor and I was working primarily as an emergency-room physician. Video games were actually our second career. The reason for our change in careers was simple: we both enjoyed working as doctors, but we liked playing and making video games a lot more.

How did you two meet, and what made you decide to form a company together?

GREG We met briefly in pre-med at the University of Alberta in our home town of Edmonton, but got to know each other and became friends during medical school. We shared a love of video games, science fiction and fantasy novels, comics, movies, and other similar art forms. We had done a little work at our medical school between 1988 and 1991 in creating some medical-education software for use at the school and by pharmaceutical companies, and by the end of school in 1992 we knew we were going to stick with making software, but we hadn't yet settled on creating games.

What made you decide to take the company into game development?

RAY In 1993, we unexpectedly got the opportunity to start working together with some very talented programmers and artists who had a promising prototype for what later became Shattered Steel, and we decided to take the plunge to start working on games. We were very excited to finally get the chance to follow our true passion. We haven't regretted that decision, as we've been able to work on some really great games over the years, and we both believe that our best work is still ahead of us.

How have things changed in the gaming industry since you started?

GREG The biggest change since the mid 1990s is simply the scale of the big, triple-A projects. When we started, our first game, Shattered Steel, peaked at 13 team members and cost less overall than a single month of development of a triple-A project in 2008. However, one exciting and unexpected thing happening in the current-day development environment is that smaller teams and smaller games are making a big comeback in the casual, mobile, and online environments. Small teams are popping up and making great games, and this is very good for the business.

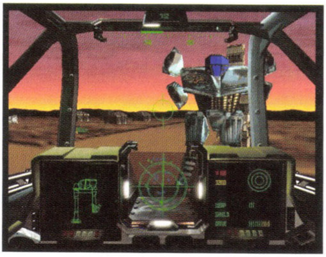
How hands-on are you with the game development process?

GREG We do like to spend a lot of time on our games, but we also give the awesome teams working on the games a lot of room to do their jobs. We tend to be very involved at the beginning of a game's development and also at the end. We spend a fair amount of time when a game is getting off the ground to make sure that the vision and game design are aligned right for the fans and the market. During the middle period we support the teams and review their progress, and at the

> *"The reason for our change in careers was simple: we both enjoyed working as doctors, but we liked playing and making video games a lot more."*

GAMEOGRAPHY

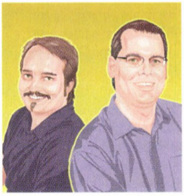
Though BioWare focused primarily on PC games in its early days, the company has moved increasingly into home-console development, and Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood marks the studio's first handheld title.



SHATTERED STEEL
1996, PC
GREG: PRODUCER

BALDUR'S GATE
1998, PC
RAY: PRODUCER

MDK 2
2000, DREAMCAST
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS



end we play the games as much as we can (we usually finish each of our games a few times before they're released) and we both provide a lot of feedback to the team.

It seems to us that Electronic Arts has changed significantly over the past year, with the company focused less on annual installments of licensed properties and placing a greater emphasis on working with outside studios and nurturing new ideas. Do you think that's an accurate assessment, and was it a major consideration in your decision to be acquired by the mega-publisher?
RAY We definitely agree that we've all been seeing an exciting new EA over the last year under John Riccitiello's leadership. The overall quality of games from EA has been skyrocketing and we've seen a consistent focus on doing the right thing for the fans, which is something we really believe in at BioWare. From a developer's perspective (and as ardent game players ourselves) we definitely believe in the "new-look" EA, and being part of a company dedicated to making great games was a big part of our decision to become a new division of EA.

What's the key to finding good development talent?
GREG Making great games, continually working on having a great working environment, and investing in people over the long term are all key elements for finding and growing great development talent.

What would you say is the most important aspect of a great RPG?
RAY We always consider four elements in our story- and character-driven games, which we call the "BioWare Pillars;" we consider all four of them to be essential ingredients for a great RPG, though they're expressed in different ways and in different combinations in all of our games. The "BioWare pillars" are compelling stories and characters; customization/personalization of your characters; exciting action, conflict, and combat; and exploration of rich, deep worlds that you want to be a part of. We strive to create genuine emotion in our games, and believe great RPGs are able to do this.

Now that you've wrapped up development on Sonic Chronicles, what are your thoughts on handheld development, and more specifically, the DS? Is it something you intend to continue moving forward?
GREG We've had a great time working on the DS and will definitely continue working on it in the future. One of the most refreshing things about the platform was the pure speed at which things move; often we would work on some big changes in the game as we iterated on the gameplay, and where we'd often have to wait a week or so on consoles to see any change, we'd be able to play the new version on the DS the very next day. This ability for tight iteration loops really helps us try out new things and make even better games!

What games or game creators, outside of BioWare, do you most admire or respect, and why?
GREG We both definitely have a lot of respect for Blizzard's work. World of Warcraft was such a monster, and their upcoming games look really great. Infinity Ward's work on Call of Duty 4 was also nothing short of amazing; it was a really polished game. Harmonix and their work on the original Guitar Hero and then Rock Band completely changed the way millions of people play.

RAY Valve not only makes absolutely great games but they are also changing the industry with Steam. Finally, the team formerly known as Irrational (now 2K Boston and 2K Australia) nailed it with Bioshock. This list could go on and on...we both try to play a lot of games on all the different systems.

What are your favorite hobbies or pastimes?
GREG Reading and playing games for me. Pretty simple.

RAY Pretty much the same for me—in addition to reading and playing all kinds of video games on all the different systems, I'd also add listening to music (particularly jazz and blues, and also alternative music), watching great movies, spending time with my wife, playing board games, and playing competitive tournament poker, which is my favorite game of all!

If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?
GREG Teleportation. I think that might prevent me from being late to meetings as often as I am now with only the power of ambulation!

RAY ESP. Not only would this let us know what kinds of games our fans want to play, but it'd be very handy when I play poker!

> *"We strive to create genuine emotion in our games, and believe great RPGs are able to do this."*

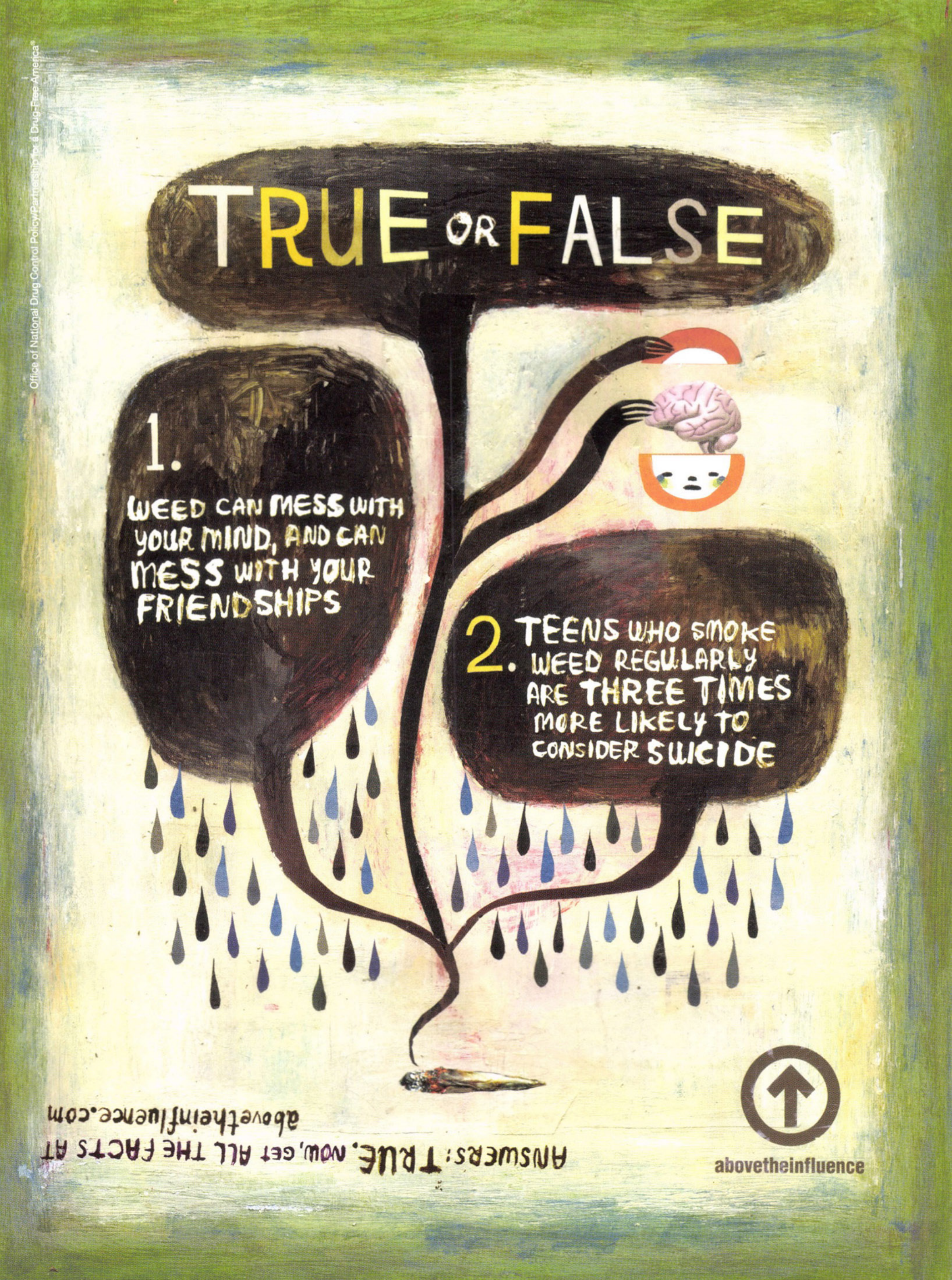
GAMEOGRAPHY

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
2003, XBOX
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

JADE EMPIRE
2005, XBOX
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

MASS EFFECT
2007, XBOX 360
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD
2008, NINTENDO DS
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS


TRUE OR FALSE
1.
WEED CAN MESS WITH YOUR MIND, AND CAN MESS WITH YOUR FRIENDSHIPS
2. TEENS WHO SMOKE WEED REGULARLY ARE THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO CONSIDER SUICIDE
ANSWERS: TRUE. NOW, GET ALL THE FACTS AT abovetheinfluence.com
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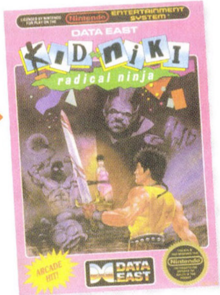
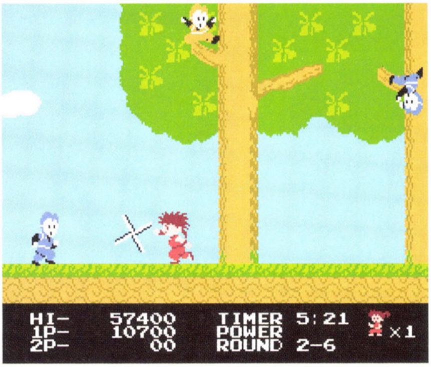
Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America®

KID NIKI: RADICAL NINJA

Ninja School will help you.
Help you be more radical, that is.



PLATFORM: NES
DEVELOPER: IREM
PUBLISHER: DATA EAST
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 1987
COVERED IN ISSUE: 2
PERCENTAGE OF RADICALNESS: 100



The Stone Wizard's masked henchmen are everywhere. Kid Niki uses his spinning sword to show them that "X" marks the spot...for pain!

If we learned anything from the '80s, it was that ninjas are totally awesome, and the only thing more awesome than being totally awesome is being totally radical. The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles made a valiant effort at being radical, but there was only one ninja radical enough to go around referring to himself as such. That ninja was Kid Niki: Radical Ninja.

With its hot-pink box, it was difficult to miss Kid Niki on store shelves. Neither that retina-searing color nor the '80s-tastic box art, however, could prepare gamers for the zaniness within. The game begins with Kid Niki training in his Ninja School. A passing bird that is mysteriously shot down by an arrow interrupts his lesson. Apparently, the bird was carrying a note explaining that the evil Stone Wizard had kidnapped Kid Niki's girlfriend, Princess Margo. And thus the adventure begins.

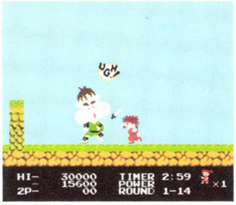
Originally an arcade game by Irem (perhaps best known for creating the R-Type series), Kid Niki: Radical Ninja sports seven levels ranging from forests to mountaintops to ornate temples. To counter the hordes of enemy ninjas, Kid Niki's powerful spinning sword was not only effective, but it looked cool, too.

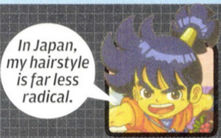
That said, this was a pretty standard platformer, and it was certainly not without its faults. The controls were a bit loose and the constant respawning enemies were a pain. Even worse was the fact that one hit was enough to kill Kid Niki (even touching a bubble did in the poor ninja). What made the game so much fun was the sheer weirdness of it all.

Particularly odd were the bosses, including Death Breath, the chubby-cheeked dude who could stun Kid Niki with his halitosis; Green Grub, the giant centipede that you skinned alive; and the Mad Monk, who attacked with word bubbles (and literal F-Bombs). Randomly jumping and attacking the air let you discover secret areas—an entire secret area took place in the belly of a giant fish!

Despite its flaws, Kid Niki was a blast to play. The memorable characters, catchy music, and general goofiness have helped keep this game in the minds of NES fans even if it wasn't one of the system's classic titles. Besides, what other game tells you, "Atta boy!" when you defeat a boss?

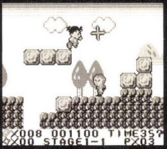
—PHIL T.



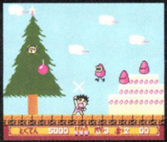

In Japan, my hairstyle is far less radical.

NINJA SECRETS

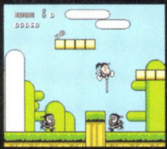
People may remember Kid Niki, but not many are aware that the game received three sequels in Japan, where the series is known as Kaiketsu Yancha Maru.



GANSO!! YANCHA-MARU
The lone Game Boy entry in the series, this game plays much like its predecessor. There are, however, all-new levels and bosses.



KAIKETSU YANCHA MARU 2: KARAKURI LAND
In addition to getting a visual makeover, Kid Niki gained a health bar. No more one-hit kills! He could also temporarily transform into animals.



KAIKETSU YANCHA MARU 3: TAIKETSU! ZOURINGEN
For his final game, Kid Niki was redesigned yet again, and his new staff weapon allowed him to bounce around like Scrooge McDuck from the NES DuckTales game.

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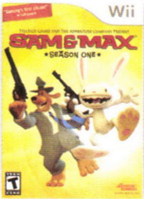
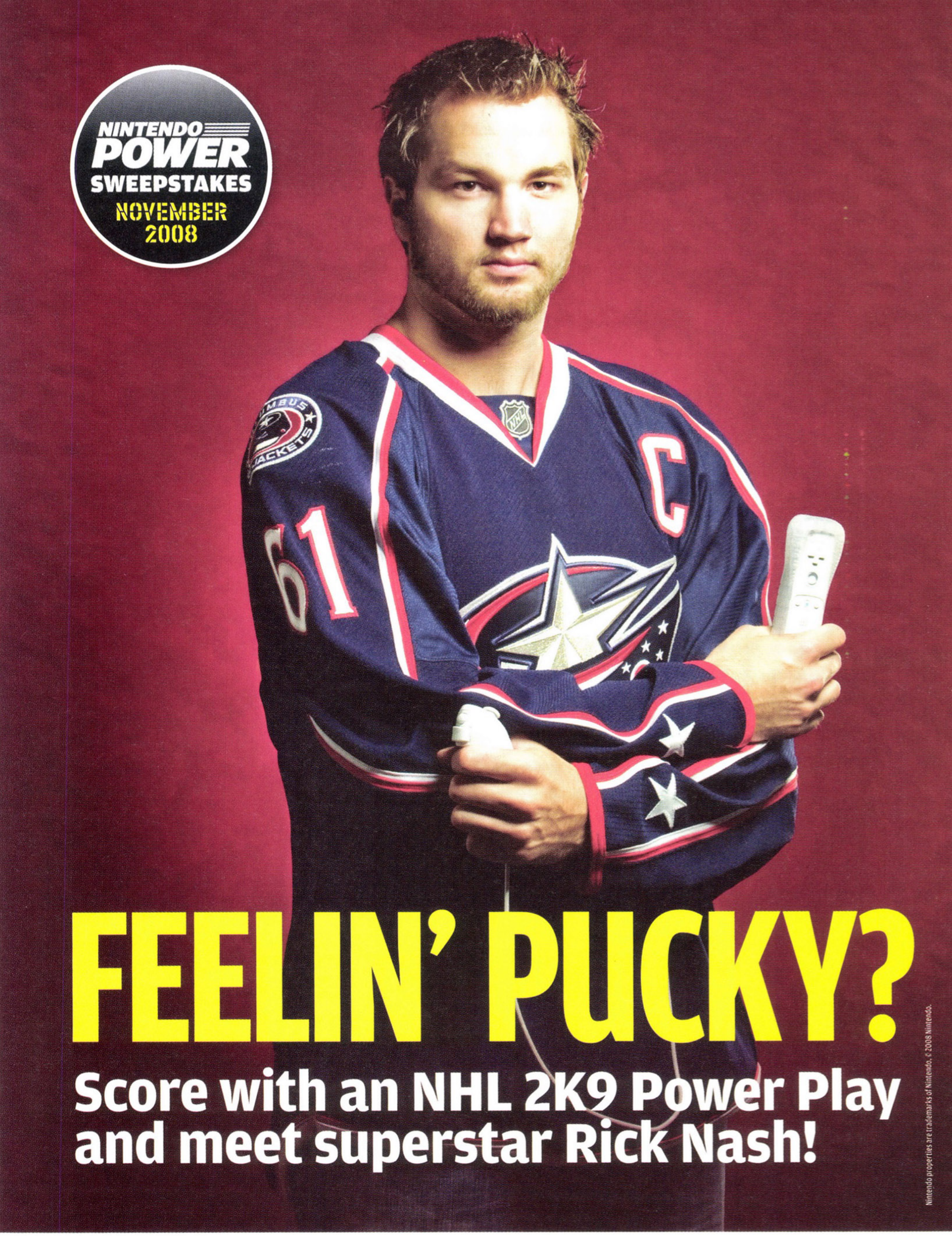


NINTENDO POWER SWEEPSTAKES
NOVEMBER 2008



FEELIN' PUCKY?

Score with an NHL 2K9 Power Play and meet superstar Rick Nash!

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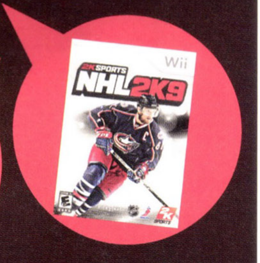
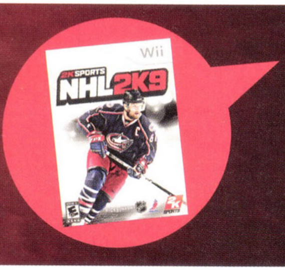
To celebrate NHL action hitting center ice on the Wii™ console for the first time, we're sending one lucky fan (and a guest) to check out the action with all-star Rick Nash, captain of the Columbus Blue Jackets and this year's NHL 2K9 spokesperson. Your grand prize Hat Trick begins with **two regular season tickets to a Blue Jackets home game** (including travel and hotel accommodations), where you'll get to meet Rick after the game. You'll also win a **Rick Nash-autographed jersey and hockey stick!** And when you get back home, you can put your stick to the ice with a copy of **NHL 2K9** for Wii.





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TO ENTER: Send us a postcard listing your full name, mailing address, phone number, and email address (if you have one). Address it as follows:

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NHLPA

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Lyrics
Mild Violence

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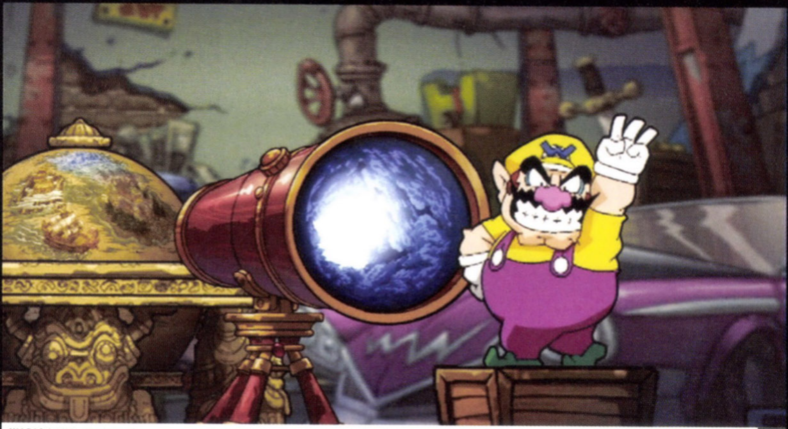
REVIEWS

IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF ALL THE LATEST GAMES

We search for treasure in **Wario Land: Shake It!**—will we find gold or go home empty? Turn the page for the full review!



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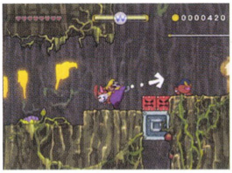
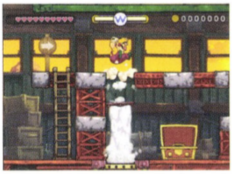
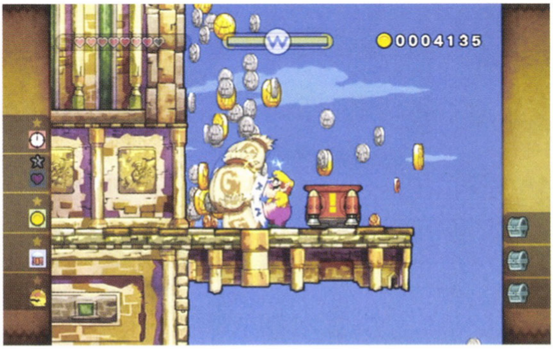
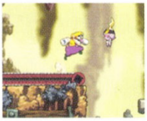








Shaking Things Up

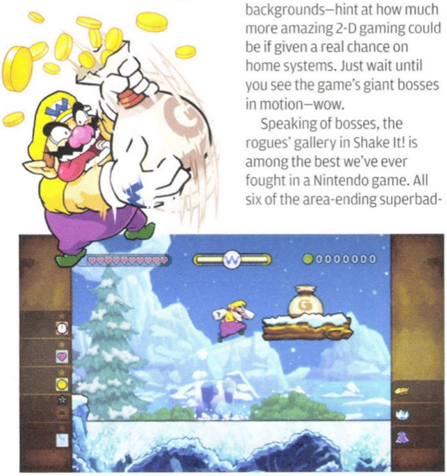
WARIO LAND: SHAKE IT!

RATING: **8.0**
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **GOOD-FEEL**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

In a fall season without Mario, Link, or Samus, it's fallen to Wario to take gamers on the traditional year-end Nintendo adventure. And while Wario Land: Shake It! isn't on the level of last November's Super Mario Galaxy, or Twilight Princess from the year prior, the puzzle-heavy action/platformer nonetheless delivers a feature-packed fun time that fans of traditional Nintendo gaming won't want to miss.

Veterans of the old Wario Land handheld adventures should feel at home instantly in this first console installment, as our tubby treasure-tracker once again waddles his way through various exotic locations, jumping, swinging, shoulder-charging, and butt-stomping to overcome obstacles in his greedy quest for loot. The well-designed levels offer plenty of fun platforming challenges, and Wario's moves are a blast to perform—especially the new motion-control actions like tossing bad guys, shaking them down for cash, and pounding the ground (all done by either tilting or shaking the Wii remote).

Shake It! is fairly slow-paced—which isn't a bad thing—but it's worth noting that this platformer lacks the snappy "hop-'n'-bop" rhythm of a great Mario title. The meat of the game is in utilizing Wario's moves to solve environment-based puzzles. Enemies are generally there to be bullied or ignored; few common foes can even damage Wario until fairly late in the game. I would have preferred a little extra danger; as it is, only the later bosses will slow down skilled players in what is a very easy march through each level's basic stage objectives. Thankfully, tougher side puzzles and bonus missions (such as beating an area without taking damage or under a time limit) provide pros with plenty of challenge to sink their teeth into.



The game looks fantastic in motion—the 2-D characters are so well animated that they give the impression of controlling a cartoon. And if you're a fan of classic Nintendo action games, it just feels great to play a major 2-D game on a console again. The top-notch animation—plus the well-rendered backgrounds—hint at how much more amazing 2-D gaming could be if given a real chance on home systems. Just wait until you see the game's giant bosses in motion—wow.

Speaking of bosses, the rogues' gallery in Shake It! is among the best we've ever fought in a Nintendo game. All six of the area-ending superbaddies look impressive and offer a unique challenge, in the classic learn-the-pattern-to-beat-them way. Except for the first couple, the bosses provide some of the game's most trying and satisfying challenges.

There isn't much to dislike about this title—we could nitpick the slightly clunky navigation on the main menu and the bare-bones shop that serves very little purpose, but most everything else is executed nicely. Our main argument against a higher score is that Shake It! simply isn't as ambitious, or on as grand a scale, as Nintendo's top-tier Wii titles. We did loathe much of the game's music, however, which includes tracks that range from the mediocre to the gratingly awful. Many tunes seem to have been written with no thought toward the theme of the levels they're played on. The worst songs come early on, however, so the music becomes more tolerable after the initial areas.

Shake It! isn't a genre-changing masterpiece like Super Mario Galaxy, but it stands up very well next to mere mortal platformers. There's some great puzzle solving and a lot of visual and gameplay variety among the levels, and it has the kind of fun controls that make you want to pick up the controller just to run around. In a gaming season that appears short on epic hard-core games, Wario's latest—and possibly best—treasure hunt is worth its weight in gold.

—CHRIS SL.

WRITERS' BLOCK

IN HONOR OF THE FALL TV SEASON, WHAT GAMES DO YOU THINK WOULD MAKE GOOD SHOWS?

Justin Cheng

This month's cover story reminded me that I'd really like to see a Grand Theft Auto TV show in the vein of *The Shield* or *The Wire*.

Chris Hoffman

I'd go with a gameshow based on WarioWare. The question: Who could we cast as Wario? Wilford Brimley is portly and mustachioed but he's way too ancient.

Tom Holoien

I think Professor Layton would make an interesting mystery show. The animation already looks great, and it would have an entertaining cast of side characters who speak in riddles.

Casey Loe

The best part about a Fire Emblem TV drama? As soon as some uppity actor asks for more money—BAM! Dead! True to the game *and* cost-effective.

Chris Shepperd

Let's see a *24*-style show based on Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop. Late-night TV could use more zombies—Larry King isn't enough.

George Sinfield

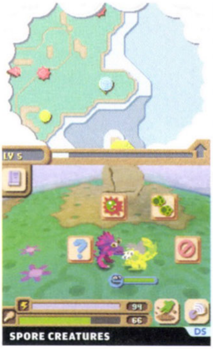
I'd either get Frank Miller (*Sin City*) to direct a series based on Suda51's Killer 7 or No More Heroes, or bring back the Super Mario Bros. Super Show.

Chris Slate

I vote for an Elite Beat Agents program that would be part musical drama, part fitness show. It would tug at your heartstrings *and* work off calories!

Steve Thomason

How can you not go with Metal Gear Solid? No other game franchise has so many compelling characters or so much great material to mine from.



SPORE CREATURES DS

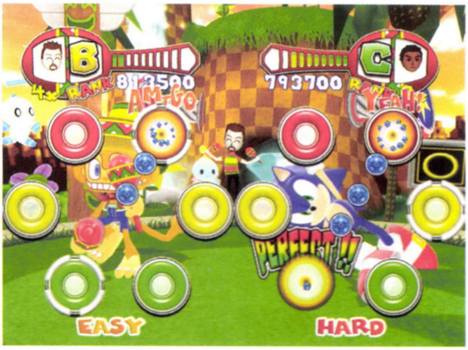
SPORE CREATURES

RATING: 8.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **MAXIS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Spore Creatures is the latest game from überdeveloper Will Wright, and like most of his work, it has a simple idea at its heart—take a life form from the primeval ooze and use a nearly endless supply of body parts to create whatever crazy thing you desire. The realistic way these creatures move and act is by far the game's most impressive feature. Gave your buddy massive back legs and tiny front ones? It stumbles around like a drunken sailor. Forgot the arms? It'll use its feet or head to ram trees and shake down fruit. There's even an online trading feature that lets you expose your creations to the rest of humanity.

But while building creatures is incredibly fun, the rest of the game is built around a standard adventure littered with fetch quests, bland fighting mechanics, and a problematic camera. And because you spend so much time fighting and making friends, the statistical aspects of body parts quickly becomes your greatest concern—a feature that adds a nice RPG touch, but effectively limits your creativity.

These quibbles might be enough to drag down another game, but Spore's creation tools and overall production values are so strong, you'll probably be willing to overlook its issues. **—ALAN A.**



Monkey Shines

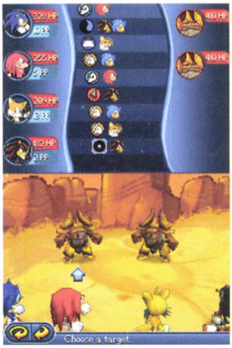
SAMBA DE AMIGO

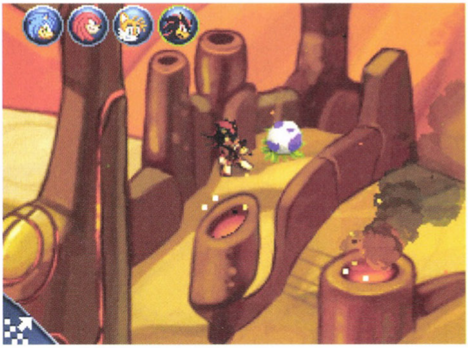
RATING: 9.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **GEARBOX**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

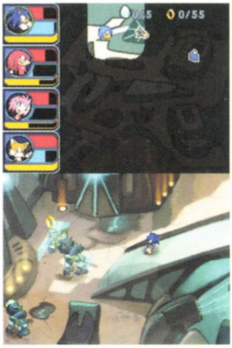
The original Samba de Amigo was ahead of its time. Music games are all the rage these days, but Sega's maraca-shaking masterpiece was something of an oddity when it hit the Dreamcast in 2000, and though it garnered overwhelming critical acclaim, the title failed to burn up the sales chart. Now that the gaming populace has found its groove, hopefully the series will achieve the success it deserves with this fantastic Wii-exclusive follow-up.

The premise is simple: shake a pair of simulated maracas to the beat of the music with the help of onscreen visual cues. But what makes Samba special is its energy. A wild-eyed, sombrero-wearing monkey and other bits of assorted madness provide an awesomely manic backdrop, while a truly inspired song list makes you want to get up and move. The game features more than 40 tracks, from conventional samba tunes like "Mambo No. 5" to Latin-infused arrangements of a-ha's "Take on Me" and Rihanna's "Pon de Replay." For the first time ever on Wii, you'll also be able to purchase downloadable song packs. Oh, and if you don't think you like Ricky Martin, you'll quickly realize you're mistaken.

Of course, the big question on the minds of Samba devotees is how the controls stack up to the Dreamcast version and its beloved maracas peripheral. The answer: extremely well. You can use either a Wii remote and nunchuk or two Wii remotes, and though the latter scheme definitely benefits from rumble and controller-emitted sound effects, both feel great. The way the game works does differ slightly from its predecessor—shake positions are now determined by where you point the controllers rather than how high you hold them—so series vets may need a few songs to get acclimated. After that, you'll be getting your Samba on and loving every minute of it. **—STEVE T.**







The Wild Blue Yonder

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

RATING: 8.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **BIOWARE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

I must admit that I've been skeptical about this one. Like lemonade and chocolate syrup, Sonic the Hedgehog and turn-based RPGs seem like two great tastes that would taste horrible together. Maybe that clash is what led the developers at BioWare to reach so far beyond both their usual RPG recipe and the Sonic catalog and mix in ingredients from Elite Beat Agents, Donkey Kong 64, and Chrono Trigger. The resultant mélange comes as a bit of a shock to the tongue, but is surprisingly tasty.

The world of Sonic Chronicles is broken up into several Sonic-style "zones," each of which is a colorful, multitiered, hand-drawn piece of art strewn with rings, Chao eggs, and quest markers. To reach them all you'll need to combine the special abilities of your team, having Knuckles climb walls, Tails soar through gaps, and Amy smash apart obstacles. Figuring out how to reach the tip of a mountain so you can soar across to a Chao egg on a distant ledge is an infinitely more interesting challenge than your typical RPG dungeon, in which repeating corridors and simple switch puzzles do little more than pad the game.

You'll find enemies crawling all over these maps, and when you touch one, your party of four heroes will battle it in a 3-D arena. At first glance, it looks like a typical turn-based RPG battle system, but the screen soon fills up with blue circles and arcs, and you'll need to use your stylus to tap, slide, and hammer away, Elite Beat Agents-style. These little rhythm games are triggered whenever you use a special POW move or whenever an enemy uses its own POW move against you. Unlike other RPGs that involve timed button presses, the reward for successfully tapping your way through a POW move routine isn't a few points of damage—it's the difference between success and failure when you're on offense, and the difference between a potentially fatal hit and a graceful evasion when you're on defense. This system adds a level of excitement that you don't often see in RPGs, especially when you desperately need to pull off a healing move and you know that one slip of your fingers could lead to the Game Over screen. Unfortunately, not every fight is worthy of such drama, and the stylus-tapping becomes a tedious bother in run-of-the-mill encounters with weaker foes. It doesn't help that the battle system forces you to use POW moves constantly, with normal attacks doing no damage against many foes and missing often against even the vulnerable ones.

The overbearing battle system becomes a major annoyance in the second half of the game, but Sonic Chronicles is worth sticking with for the many things it gets right. Witty dialogue and the option to choose between lengthy chats and straight-to-business conversation stoppers makes the game's otherwise-generic Chaos Emerald-hunt storyline enjoyable throughout. The ever-growing cast of party members was a pleasant surprise, and all the characters are fun and interesting in their own ways (except for Big, of course—there's no redeeming him). A series of Chrono Trigger-inspired Team POW moves makes every new combination of fighters interesting, and the way unused characters level up from the bench ensures that no one falls behind. The ability to customize your fighters by equipping them with Chao companions (which can be traded wirelessly) and choosing which special moves to buy when they level up adds just the right touch of character customization.

Ticking in at around 15-20 hours, Sonic Chronicles isn't particularly long for an RPG. But its quest is dense with gameplay and unfolds at a far quicker pace than most games in this typically sedate genre. Sonic Chronicles may annoy you at times, but it certainly won't ever bore you.

—CASEY L.

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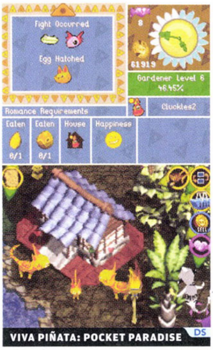
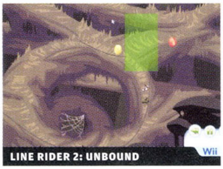
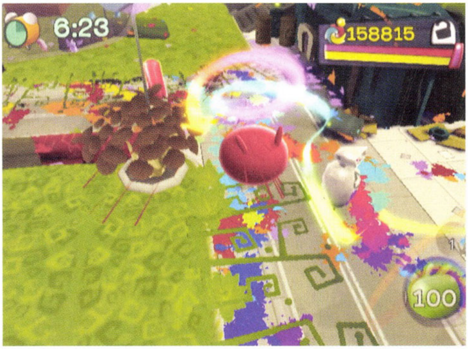


VIVA PIÑATA: POCKET PARADISE DS



LINE RIDER 2: UNBOUND Wii

LINE RIDER 2: UNBOUND Wii



VIVA PIÑATA: POCKET PARADISE

RATING: 7.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **RARE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Viva Piñata gives players a plot of land and all the tools they need to transform it into the perfect ecosystem for wild piñatas. Planting fruits and flowers will lure certain species, and as they take up permanent residence in your garden they'll lure over predatory piñatas in turn. With careful management of your ecosystem, you can try to win a visit from every species in the piñata pyramid (this game's equivalent of Pokémon's Pokédex) or simply make a hospitable permanent home for the ones you like best.

Viva Piñata may have been a marquee title for the Xbox 360, but it plays great on the Nintendo DS. The all-stylus control scheme is immediately intuitive, allowing you to zip around your garden quickly, water and dig with ease, and make piñata love connections by dragging a line from one papier-mâché beast to another. But while the interface is a dream, the limited screen space has reduced the piñatas to simple, tiny models that aren't very visually appealing and don't project a lot of personality. Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise has all the depth of its console cousin, but is missing some of its charm. —**CASEY L.**

LINE RIDER 2: UNBOUND

RATING: 5.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **INXILE ENTERTAINMENT**
DEVELOPER: **GENIUS PRODUCTS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Line Rider's transition from Flash-based phenomenon to full-fledged Wii game is a bumpy one. The main puzzle mode, in which you draw lines to fill in gaps so your sledder can make it down the hill, suffers from an extremely clunky interface, and each level requires lots of tedious trial and error, a problem exacerbated by how difficult it is to make precise changes. Even worse, your rider will occasionally fall *through* lines for no apparent reason. Throw in an extremely grating soundtrack, and the whole thing grows tiresome pretty quickly. It's cool that you can create your own stages and upload them online for other players to tackle, but most will find the core experience too frustrating to hold their interest that long.
—**STEVE T.**

Color Me Good

DE BLOB

RATING: 8.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **BLUE TONGUE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Although THQ's de Blob is all about painting, it's anything but by the numbers. Part platformer, part action game, and part puzzler, de Blob is tremendously satisfying, not only when rolling around the monochromatic world and bringing the drab locales to life by restoring their color, but also when squashing enemies and navigating the well-designed environments. There's nothing else like it on Wii; some comparisons could be made to Katamari Damacy as far its whimsy and the way you progress through the levels, but de Blob arguably has better structure thanks to each stage's plethora of missions that both challenge and guide you. Additionally, the game encourages exploration and free-form gameplay; since you're rewarded with more points and extra time for simply painting buildings and liberating the oppressed citizens within, it's always worth venturing off the beaten path. Admittedly, there's not a ton of variety (there are only four basic mission types), but it remains fun throughout thanks to extremely polished controls, visuals, and music, as well as a surprisingly cool (and funny) story. The environments could use a bit more diversity, however, and I wish there were more bosses—there's really only one legitimate boss fight, and that's at the very end of the game. de Blob never gets particularly tough, but unlockable bonus levels test your skills, and a fun multiplayer mode adds longevity to the game. de Blob could—and should—be one of the biggest Wii hits of 2008.
—**CHRIS H.**

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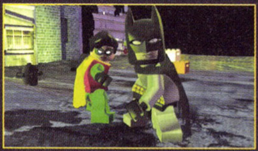

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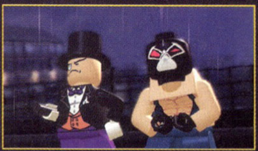

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HELPER TO HERO
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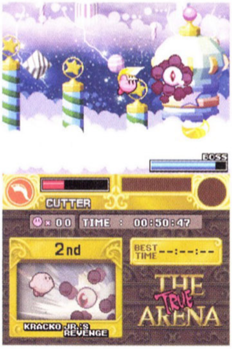

STOCK 06
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SUPER B
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SP.D

BLEACH: DARK SOULS DS

NHL 2K9 Wii

BALANCE
PUNCH

NHL 2K9 Wii

Pretty in Pink

KIRBY SUPER STAR ULTRA

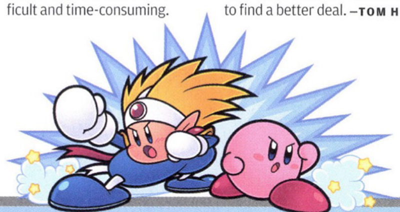
RATING: 9.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **HAL**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

There's been a lot of talk lately about Nintendo deciding to focus on the casual audience rather than the hardcore gamer, but people seem to forget that the two aren't mutually exclusive. Kirby Super Star Ultra, the pink puffball's latest offering for the DS, is proof that just because a game has cartoony looks and can be picked up by anyone doesn't mean hardcore gamers won't enjoy it.

A remake of the SNES's Kirby Super Star, KSSU features all eight games that were included in the original, along with a graphics update and some new cut-scenes. Though the games start out simple, easing you into the gameplay, they quickly grow more difficult and time-consuming. The games feature the same basic mechanics but differ in ways that make each one seem fresh and exciting, ranging from story-based adventures to treasure hunting in caves to the Arena, where you fight all the bosses back-to-back with only a handful of healing items. If the game ended here it would be great, but luckily for us there's even more.

Seven new games (four full ones and three minigames) complement the original eight, and with their upped difficulties they show that KSSU isn't just for casual players. Meta Knight Ultra, where you replay the original games as Meta Knight, could be a whole game in itself; Revenge of the King is a darker, more difficult take on the game Spring Breeze; and the new Arena modes are maddeningly difficult.

It's rare for a title to achieve truly universal appeal, but it's hard to think of any gamer who wouldn't enjoy Kirby Super Star Ultra, and with 15 games in one, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better deal. **—TOM H.**



BLEACH: DARK SOULS

RATING: 8.5
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **TREASURE**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Keeping the basic button-masher-friendly gameplay of last year's Bleach: The Blade of Fate, Dark Souls expands the playable-character roster from 28 to 44 and dishes out a new sprawling storyline that fills in the blanks between the first two seasons of the *Bleach* television series. A flow chart keeps track of story branches, some of which you can't unlock until you get keys by winning battles. If you can follow all of the story's rivalries, arguments, and misunderstandings, you're a true Bleach fan. If not, you'll still enjoy the variety of battle types, from all-out takedowns to skill contests.

You construct a Spirit Card deck for each scenario, and you can also customize them between conflicts, which comes in handy for specialized challenges. In a contest to jump between the 2-D battlefield's background and foreground more times than your opponent, for instance, you would stack the deck with cards that give your character more mobility and restrict your opponent's ability to jump lines.

Basic deck construction is as easy as tapping card icons and selecting from the game's card collection (expanded from its predecessor's), but setting up advanced configurations is a job for only those who want to eke out every possible Spirit Card advantage. In battle, hardcore players will want to trigger special moves with complex button-and-pad combos while more casual players will opt for tap-to-trigger touch-screen icons and Auto mode, which puts characters into defensive posture automatically. The action-game geniuses at Treasure have managed to make the game both accessible and challenging and add enough story, Spirit Cards, and characters to justify this sequel. **—GEORGE S.**

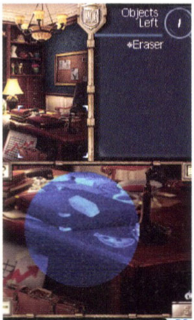
NHL 2K9

RATING: 7.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **2K SPORTS**
DEVELOPER: **VISUAL CONCEPTS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

NHL 2K9 is aimed at both serious and casual hockey fans. On the one hand, it's a full-featured simulation boasting all of the expected bells and whistles. On the other hand, the option for simplified controls allows even those who haven't played a hockey game since the Genesis days to hit the ice and have fun. The franchise's Wii debut isn't without some first-year growing pains, however. Visually it's subpar, the AI can be a bit wonky at times, and the lack of online play is disappointing, especially given what EA Sports has done in that arena. Still, for Wii owners looking to lace up their skates, this is the only game in town and it's not half-bad. **—STEVE T.**

SIMCITY CREATOR Wii

SIMCITY CREATOR Wii



MYSTERY CASE FILES: MILLIONHEIR DS

SIMCITY CREATOR

RATING: 6.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON SOFT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Managing a city budget and developing a municipal zoning strategy hardly sound like the bases for a compelling video game, but for years the SimCity franchise has hooked millions of armchair mayors with its deep, accessible, strangely addictive take on urban planning. Those inclined to such activities will find the same basic pleasures at the core of SimCity Creator. Unfortunately, a few key missteps prevent it from achieving the franchise's typically high approval ratings. First and foremost is that many aspects of the game feel obtuse. There are no opinion polls or in-game help balloons like those found in previous PC installments, and a misguided effort to make the game "cute" (so Grandma will play) means your advisors often forgo offering, you know, actual advice, in favor of making small talk about game shows or candy. As a result, you're left scratching your head as to why people aren't using a newly constructed subway station, for instance, or, more important, why your city's population isn't growing. Creator also lacks many of the advancements introduced in 2003's SimCity 4, which is sure to disappoint longtime fans. Using the Wii remote to navigate menus is nice, but the game otherwise brings nothing substantively new to the formula and provides too little guidance for SimCity novices. If you have a PC (or Mac), you're better off tracking down the aforementioned SimCity 4 for a few bucks. **—STEVE T.**

MYSTERY CASE FILES: MILLIONHEIR

RATING: 6.5
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **BIG FISH GAMES/ GRYPTONITE GAME**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir isn't going to take the place of the latest platformer or RPG in your DS library, but for what it is—a visual puzzle that tests of your powers of perception—it fills its niche well. The backgrounds and objects are nicely rendered, the single-player story mode is quite lengthy, and there are even minigames and tools to add some welcome variety. The reuse of environments is a bit disappointing, but a quick-play mode and multiplayer options give the title some replayability. One word of warning: don't even try playing this without a DS Lite. The brighter screen is essential for searching for hidden objects. **—CHRIS H.**

8 BIT HEROES
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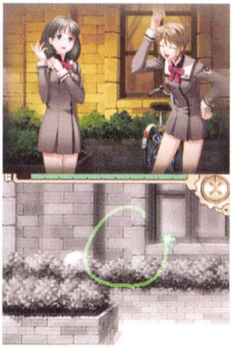
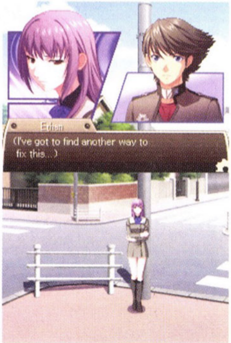
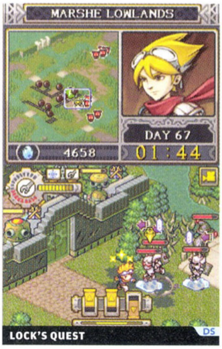
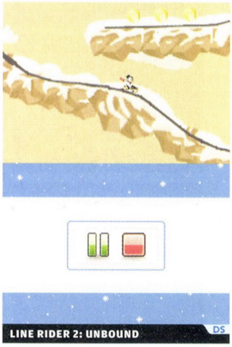






LOCK'S QUEST DS



LINE RIDER 2: UNBOUND DS

Pleasant Time

TIME HOLLOW

RATING: 7.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
ESRB: **TEEN**

As a text-heavy point-and-click adventure game, Time Hollow has a lot going for it. The characters are interesting, the mystery-laden story is intriguing, and the anime-style visuals (including some very nicely done movie sequences) are great. The game even manages to improve upon the traditional point-and-click formula by letting you scroll the background to find hidden items. Then there's the biggest hook—the ability to carve a hole into the past (by drawing on the touch screen) to manipulate reality. It's a great idea and a promising premise, but its potential goes unfulfilled. With the ability to alter the past literally at your fingertips, you should be able to solve problems in a myriad of ways, yet the game's mostly linear storytelling rarely lets you use your powers creatively. Additionally, the plot veers off in some weird and ultimately unsatisfying ways near the climax, especially as it pertains to the game's villain. The gameplay would have benefited from more chances to use items outside of interacting with time rifts, too. Despite its missed opportunities, I found myself hooked on Time Hollow for the duration of its six chapters, continuously caught up in the drama of its characters and curious to see where fate (or whatever was manipulating them) would take them next. I hope someday Konami has time to release a more satisfying sequel. —**CHRIS H.**

LOCK'S QUEST

RATING: 7.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **5TH CELL**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

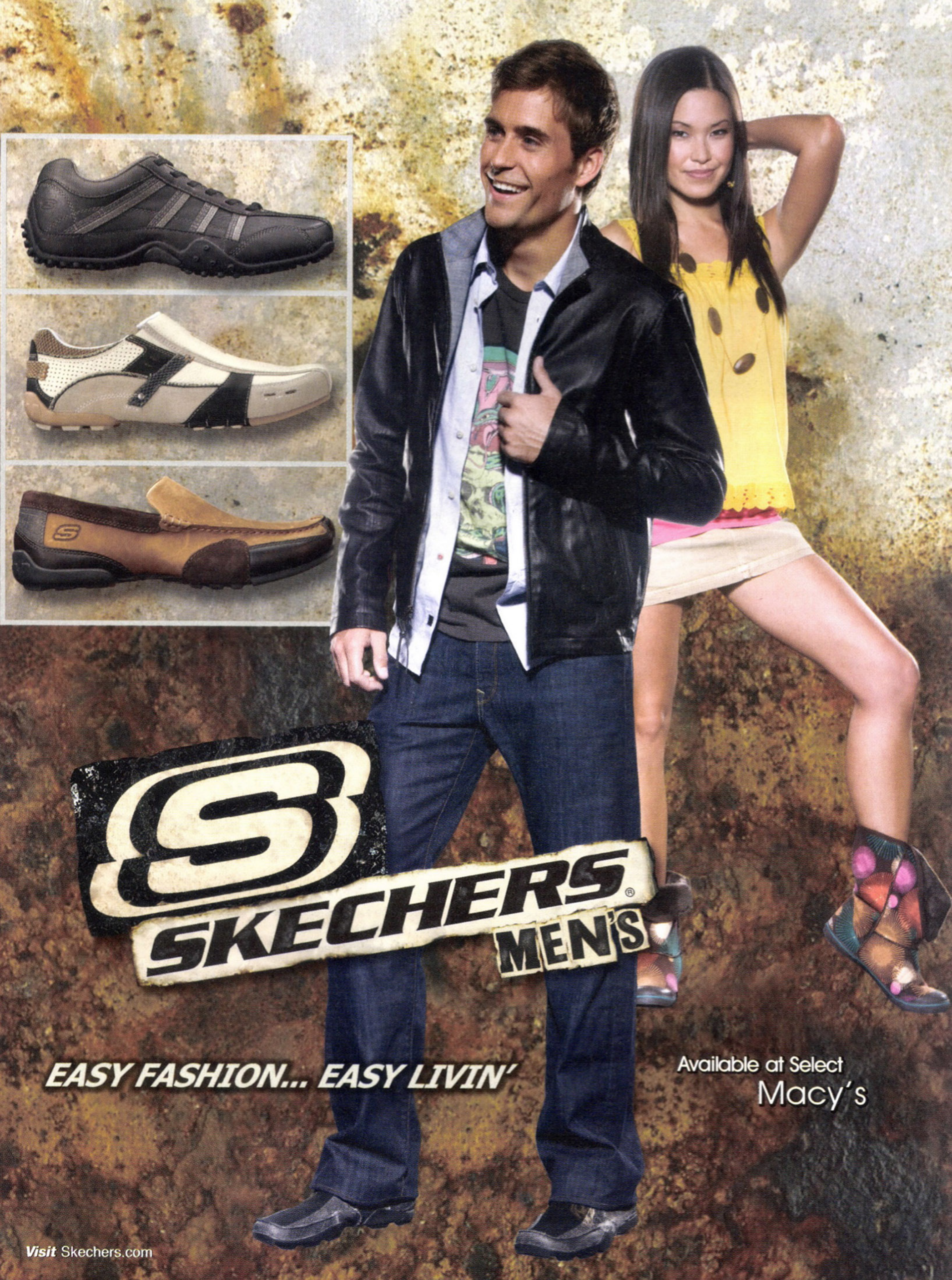
Fun but flawed, Lock's Quest takes real-time strategy into character-based adventure territory with stylus-controlled precision. During building phases, you drag and drop walls, turrets, mines, and helpers into strategic places on the battlefield. A grid pattern helps you line up the objects, but the isometric view causes some objects to obscure others, making you lose precious time while sorting it all out. In battle, you earn "source" (the game's currency) and points (which charge up additional moves) for defeating Clockworks, then spend the cash in the building phase for more armaments. If you start off a series of battles in good shape, you'll coast to victory. If not, you'll struggle through a few fights and then probably restart the series for a lack of funds. In the first hour or two, new turrets and mines are issued at a good clip. After that they're doled out at an aggravatingly slow pace. Lock doesn't build experience and he very rarely earns new moves, so there are long stretches in which progress can be counted only by the number of battles you survive. A strong story involving a suspicious Archineer leader and the kidnapping of Lock's friend Emi provides motivation to keep moving through the dull parts, and the side-view Siege minigame provides much-needed gameplay variety, along with terrific tap-to-shoot play control. Another minigame, which challenges you to assemble four-piece puzzles for the right to build new objects, is, at turns, mindlessly simple and frustratingly difficult. —**GEORGE S.**

LINE RIDER 2: UNBOUND

RATING: 6.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **INXILE ENTERTAINMENT**
DEVELOPER: **GENIUS PRODUCTS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

If the name rings a bell, it's because Line Rider has been a popular Flash-based online game for ages. Unbound takes the original concept (draw a line freehand, watch a guy on a sled slide down it) and spins an assortment of challenging puzzles out of it. Presented with a complex but incomplete course, it's your job to fill in the gaps so our hero lands safely at the bottom of the hill.

Some players may still have the most fun with the basic freestyle mode, though, drawing a gigantic mess of loop-the-loops and seeing if the poor sledder survives them. (He usually doesn't.) The visual presentation is pretty bare-bones, but this is still a nifty physics experiment turned puzzler, and a sound-effects suite full of crunches and screams means all you closet sadists will have a blast. —**DAVID S.**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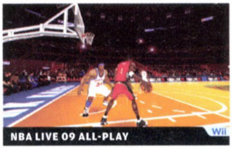
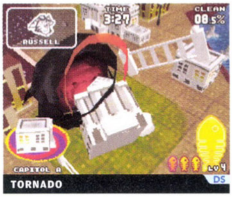
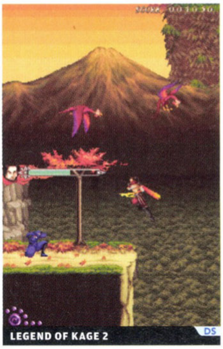


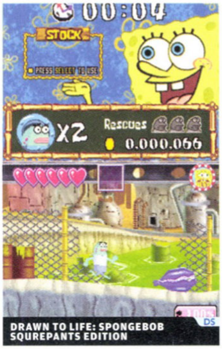
NBA LIVE 09 ALL-PLAY Wii



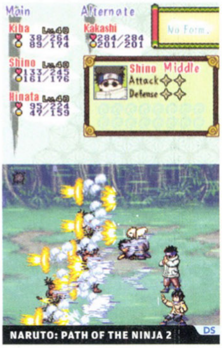
TORNADO DS



LEGEND OF KAGE 2 DS



DRAWN TO LIFE: SPONGEBOB SQUREPANTS EDITION DS



NARUTO: PATH OF THE NINJA 2 DS

NBA LIVE 09 ALL-PLAY

RATING: **4.0**
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Talk about a franchise in need of a Redeem Team. NBA Live's Wii struggles continue with another lackluster effort plagued by glitchy animation, unresponsive motion controls, and atrocious AI. Those looking for a sim will likely feel most let down as CPU players pretty much refuse to play defense and spend the vast majority of their time just standing around. Plus, fouls are bizarrely infrequent—I would sometimes play through an entire game without a single trip to the free-throw line. There's not much here for casual fans either. All of the party games are pretty stale, and the 2-on-2 mode is a pale imitation of classics like NBA Jam and EA's own NBA Street. **—STEVE T.**

TORNADO

RATING: **6.0**
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **IGNITION**
DEVELOPER: **SUCCESS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Tornado takes the Katamari Damacy concept and uses it to fill the void that Namco Bandai has left on DS. Yeah, you're sucking things up in a tornado, not rolling them up in a ball, but the basic principals apply (suck up small items to grow your tornado until it can suck up big ones), plus Tornado has a similar wacky charm and even a mischievous prince. It's a winning formula that works most of the time, but at other times it's incredibly frustrating—specifically in some of the later stages where the things you're searching for are randomly placed and you have to complete unrevealed objectives in order to find them. A strict time limit also detracts from what's otherwise a fun game. **—CHRIS H.**

THE LEGEND OF KAGE 2

RATING: **8.0**
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **TAITO**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Do you fondly remember The Legend of Kage? If so, congratulations. You are very, very old.

Luckily, this is not the original game, which hasn't aged well since 1985. Legend of Kage 2 is another ninja side-scroller, but everything else is new. It's a fast-paced game, like a souped-up Ninja Gaiden, with more places to go and more ways to kill stuff than any NES game could have offered. The two DS screens make for much more vertical level designs—there are many different layers to every stage, with lots of hidden areas to reach in the treetops—and both playable characters have a huge collection of special attacks and ninjutsu techniques to develop as the quest goes on.

The DS has given us plenty of solid side-scrollers, but Legend of Kage 2 is something special. Its graphics combine detailed animation with subtle, understated colors, and with so many different ways to slice and dice the bad guys, you'll probably remember it much longer than the first one. **—DAVID S.**

DRAWN TO LIFE: SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS EDITION

RATING: **7.0**
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **ALTRON**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

For those who are artistically inclined, the chance to contribute to SpongeBob's world should be a dream. The Bikini Bottom-themed take on THQ and 5th Cell's innovative platforming concept (Altron has taken on development for the sequel) lets you draw your own hero, house, furnishings, platforms, health pickups, and even enemies-turned-friends. The specifics of your creations don't affect gameplay, but the make-it-yourself concept is a new way to interact with an established cartoon universe. If you're not an artist, you can trace over predesigned characters or select them without embellishment. While you're running and jumping, you are tasked with clearing away Goo on the touch screen, which is more stylus-juggling chore than entertainment. The game's 20 levels (including vehicle chases) give you plenty of play, but the reason to pick it up is to flex your creative muscles. **—GEORGE S.**

NARUTO: PATH OF THE NINJA 2

RATING: **6.5**
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **TOMY**
DEVELOPER: **TOMY**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

The path of the ninja is pretty much the same as it was last time around, it seems—role-playing game Path of the Ninja 2 looks and plays almost identically to its predecessor, and takes just as long to finish (10-12 hours). The only major additions are more characters (including animal allies that can help you reach new areas), a side-scrolling platforming-style minigame between areas on the world map, Wi-Fi multiplayer that actually works rather well, and an original story. This last point is especially important since a common critique of the first game was that the story didn't cover any new ground for die-hard Naruto fans, but it's a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it's new; on the other, it feels like a fairly standard filler episode in the anime series. **—JUSTIN C.**

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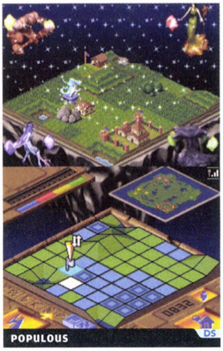
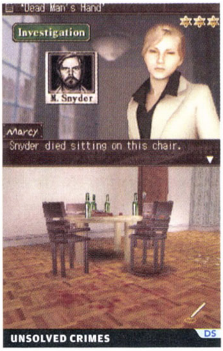
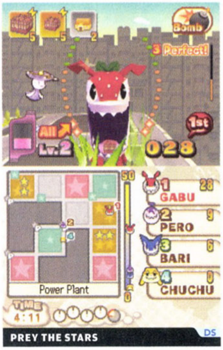

POPULOUS DS

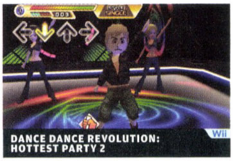


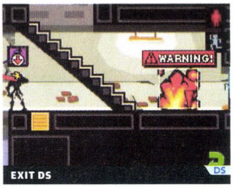
Marcy
Snyder died sitting on this chair.

UNSOLVED CRIMES DS



PREY THE STARS DS


DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION: HOTTEST PARTY 2 Wii



EXIT DS DS

POPULOUS

RATING: 7.0
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **XSEED GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **GENKI**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Before the letters "R-T-S" meant anything next to each other, there was Populous. Peter Molyneux's first "god game" was a groundbreaker on the PC many years ago, and it's not half-bad on the DS today, once you get past a modest learning curve.

As the patron deity of a primitive tribe, it's your job to make life easy for your followers and rain fiery punishment on a rival god's people. The DS version's control scheme is somewhat indirect—you manipulate the world through a wire-frame view on the touch screen and see the effects of your actions in more detail up above. It works well enough with a bit of practice, though, and 50 complete scenarios in the single-player challenge mode add up to plenty of time spent playing god. **—DAVID S.**

UNSOLVED CRIMES

RATING: 4.5
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **EMPIRE INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **NOW PRODUCTION**
ESRB: **TEEN**

If you're someone who was regularly shocked by the surprise twist at the end of *Murder, She Wrote*, Unsolved Crimes will be right up your alley. The rest of us, however, will see most of the solutions coming from a thousand stylus clicks away—and that's too bad, because there's no way to skip past the endless questions from your brain-dead partner and just get to the part where you identify the guilty party. There are a few things to like here, though—some of the touch-based puzzles are clever, the ambient sound effects are surprisingly effective, and the '70s-cop-show vibe is awesome in an eye-rolling kind of way. But since the vast majority of objectives consist of answering questions based on evidence already in your possession, it ends up being little more than an open-book test. **—ALAN A.**

PREY THE STARS

RATING: 5.5
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **KOEI**
DEVELOPER: **KOEI CANADA**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Prey the Stars is like a balloon—it gets bigger and better until it pops and becomes useless. You play a round blob bent on eating everything from fire trucks to Ferris wheels while other blobs try to gorge themselves, too. Borrowing a little from Pac-Man, Katamari Damacy, and Super Smash Bros., there's no shortage of good ideas in this frenetic combat title—unfortunately, the developers saw fit to include them all, regardless of how they mesh with each other. The game starts out simple enough, but by the time you learn all of the concepts it's impossible to keep track of everything that's going on. It doesn't really matter in the long run, though, because unbalanced power-ups and special abilities turn each battle into a roll of the dice. **—CHRIS SH.**

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION HOTTEST PARTY 2

RATING: 8.0
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
ESRB: **EVERYBODY 10+**

As per usual with the DDR franchise, the sequel to last year's DDR Hottest Party doesn't make any massive strides beyond the first game. However, the improvements that have been made are significant enough to make Hottest Party 2 a worthwhile buy. The graphics have been given a significant improvement, and though the game still incorporates the hand motions and gimmick moves from the first Hottest Party, these can now be turned off in the options menu for a more traditional DDR experience. Songs range from hits by Maroon 5 and Michael Jackson to classic DDR-style techno tracks—there really is something for everybody. Try it out with some friends and you won't be disappointed. **—TOM H.**

EXIT DS

RATING: 7.5
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **TAITO**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Despite some obvious problems with Exit DS, it's precisely the kind of game we should be seeing more of on the DS. The 2-D puzzler isn't heavy on story, and the levels are perfect for playing on the bus. Beware, though—the missions start out pretty hard, and only get more challenging as the game goes on. The touch screen has a few issues: sometimes it doesn't recognize the gestures correctly, making the hero jump off a ledge or into a fire, but it usually gets the job done. Thank goodness the game sounds aren't integral to the experience, because the whining from the people you're trying to rescue is insufferable. Exit DS could have benefited from co-op multiplayer and a create-and-share level designer, but otherwise it's a solid (if unspectacular) title worthy of some frustratingly fun bus rides. **—CHRIS SH.**

ALSO THIS MONTH

We gave Eidos' **N+** for DS a 7.0 a few issues back; it's finally coming to stores.... **LEGO Batman** is landing on DS and Wii from WB Interactive. It's a lot like other LEGO adventures.... **Lost in Blue: Shipwrecked** brings Konami's survival series to Wii.

The Best New Web Videos
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[REVIEWS ARCHIVE]

Reminder: Sevens Are Good

Oh, the poor, misunderstood 7. You see, a lot of games scored a 7 or 7.5 last issue, but that just means those games are good! While the games may have some flaws, they're ultimately worth playing (at least a rental). Think about it this way: a 7.0 is a whole two points higher than the average (5.0)—that's pretty darn good, don't you think?

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS.
• INDICATES WI-FI COMPATIBLE

Wii				
TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Alone in the Dark	4.0	Atari	232	M
Alvin and the Chipmunks	N/A	Brash	224	E
Backyard Baseball '09	N/A	Atari	231	E
Baroque	3.0	Atlus	227	T
Battle of the Bands	7.0	THQ	228	T
Ben 10: Protector of Earth	N/A	D3PA	223	E10+
Blast Works: Build, Trade, Destroy	8.5	Majesco	229	E
Bomberman Land	5.0	Hudson	226	E
Boom Blox	8.0	Electronic Arts	229	E
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Rockstar	227	T
Castle of Shikigami III	7.0	Aksys	228	T
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	T
Code Lyoko: Quest for Infinity	N/A	The Game Factory	223	E10+
Cranium Kabookii	N/A	Ubisoft	224	E
Cruis'n	N/A	Midway	224	E
CSI: Hard Evidence	N/A	Ubisoft	225	M
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	7.0	Eidos	230	T
Deca Sports	N/A	Hudson	229	E
Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed	7.0	THQ	227	T
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 3	N/A	Atari	223	T
Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	7.0	Square Enix	226	T
Dream Pinball 3D	N/A	Southpeak	228	E10+
Emergency Heroes	N/A	Ubisoft	230	E10+
Emergency Mayhem	N/A	Codemasters	228	T
• Endless Ocean	7.5	Nintendo	225	E
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.5	System 3	233	E
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	7.5	Square Enix	231	E10+
Furu Furu Park	N/A	Majesco	225	T
Game Party	N/A	Midway	224	E
• Ghost Squad	7.0	Sega	223	T
Godzilla Unleashed	5.5	Atari	223	E10+
The Golden Compass	4.0	Sega	224	E10+
• Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	7.0	RedOctane	232	T
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.5	Natsume	233	E
Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law	6.5	Capcom	224	T
High School Musical: Sing It!	N/A	Disney Interactive	223	E
The House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return	7.0	Sega	227	M
The Incredible Hulk	3.5	Sega	231	T
Indoor Sports	N/A	Konami	223	E
Indy 500 Legends	N/A	Destineer	223	E
Iron Man	5.5	Sega	229	T
Jenga	N/A	Atari	223	E
Jumper	N/A	Brash	226	T
Karaoke Revolution Presents American Idol Encore	N/A	Konami	226	E
Kawasaki Quad Bikes	N/A	Destineer	223	E
Kidz Sports: Basketball	N/A	Destineer	224	E
Kidz Sports: Ice Hockey	N/A	Destineer	225	E
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E10+
Link's Crossbow Training	6.5	Nintendo	223	T
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
• Madden NFL 09 All-Play	9.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
Manhunt 2	7.5	Rockstar Games	223	M
• Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	7.5	Sega	223	E
• Mario Kart Wii	9.0	Nintendo	228	E
Mario Super Sluggers	7.5	Nintendo	233	E
• Medal of Honor Heroes 2	8.0	Electronic Arts	223	T
MiniCopter: Adventure Flight	6.5	Aksys	228	E
MLB 2K8	6.5	2K Sports	227	E
MLB Power Pros 2008	7.0	2K Sports	232	E
• MX vs. ATV Untamed	6.0	THQ	224	E
My Horse and Me	N/A	Atari	225	E
My Word Coach	N/A	Ubisoft	223	E
NCAA Football 09 All-Play	5.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
Need For Speed ProStreet	8.0	Electronic Arts	223	E10+
Nicktoons: Attack of the Toybots	N/A	THQ	223	E
• NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams	9.0	Sega	224	E
Ninja Reflex	N/A	Electronic Arts	227	E10+
• Nitro Bike	3.5	Ubisoft	225	E10+
No More Heroes	8.0	Ubisoft	226	M
Obscure: The Aftermath	7.0	Ignition	227	M
Octomania	N/A	Conspiracy	227	E
Okami	7.5	Capcom	228	T
One Piece: Unlimited Adventure	6.5	Namco Bandai	225	T
Opoona	7.0	Koei	227	E10+
Order Up!	7.0	Zoo Games	232	E
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	7.5	Crave	227	E10+
• Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	N/A	Konami	227	E
Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	N/A	D3PA	224	E10+
• Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	6.5	Ubisoft	223	E10+
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles	8.0	Capcom	223	M
Rock Band	8.0	MTV Games	231	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 1	6.5	MTV Games	232	T
Sam & Max Season One	7.0	The Adventure Company	233	T
Samurai Warriors: Katana	7.5	Koei	224	T
Sega Bass Fishing	5.0	Sega	227	E
Sega Superstars Tennis	8.0	Sega	227	E10+
Showtime Championship Boxing	N/A	Jack of All Games	224	E10+
The Simpsons Game	4.0	Electronic Arts	223	T
Smarty Pants	N/A	Electronic Arts	223	E
SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1	8.5	SNK Playmore	233	T
• Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity	7.0	Sega	225	E
Soulcalibur Legends	6.5	Namco Bandai	223	T
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E10+
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	7.5	LucasArts	233	T
Summer Sports: Paradise Island	3.5	Destineer	228	E
Super Mario Galaxy	9.5	Nintendo	223	E
• Super Smash Bros. Brawl	10	Nintendo	226	T
Super Swing Golf Season 2	6.5	Tecmo	224	E10+
Target: Terror	N/A	Konami	227	M
• Tiger Woods PGA Tour All-Play	8.5	Electronic Arts	233	E
Tomb Raider Anniversary	6.5	Eidos	223	T
Top Spin 3	7.0	2K Sports	229	E
Trauma Center: New Blood	8.0	Atlus	223	T
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
We Cheer	N/A	Namco Bandai	233	E
• We Love Golf!	8.5	Capcom	231	E10+
We Ski	6.0	Namco Bandai	229	E
Wild Earth: African Safari	N/A	Majesco	228	E

REVIEWER NOTES

FINAL FANTASY IV

As a lapsed 16-bit RPG fan who took a decade off from questing, I haven't found the DS remake of FFIV to be as satisfying a return to the genre as I'd hoped. Contrary to the praise that most hardcore RPG players have given this game, I find its overwhelming focus on dungeon crawling to be monotonous, its towns bare-bones, its world fairly generic, and its simplistic story only mildly compelling. I'm now starting Dragon Quest IV and, so far, prefer its more colorful, interactive towns and snappier pace. **—CHRIS SL.**

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 09 ALL-PLAY

There have already been a lot of great golf games for Wii, but this year's edition of Tiger is the very best. Save those green fees and hit the links in the comfort of your own home.

—STEVE T.

NEW INTERNATIONAL TRACK AND FIELD

Konami's Track and Field series has had a spotty record as of late, but this DS update—featuring loads of events and tons of unlockables—is a winner. The stylus controls work well, and the button-based control option is a nice inclusion for old-schoolers. But man—on higher difficulties you'll feel like you need some real-life wrist-strength training in order to place. **—CHRIS H.**

Worms: A Space Oddity	6.0	THQ	227	E10+
WWII Aces	3.0	Destineer	226	T
NINTENDO DS				
• Advance Wars: Days of Ruin	8.5	Nintendo	225	E10+
Alvin and the Chipmunks	N/A	Brash	223	E
American Girl: Julie Finds a Way	N/A	THQ	224	E
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney	8.0	Capcom	226	T
Are you Smarter Than a 5th Grader?	N/A	THQ	223	E
Arkanoid DS	6.5	Square Enix	230	E
Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles	7.5	Ubisoft	226	T
Bangai-O Spirits	8.0	D3PA	232	E10+
• Bomberman Land Touch! 2	6.0	Hudson	225	E
Boogie	7.0	Electronic Arts	224	E10+
Brain Challenge	N/A	Ubisoft	225	E
Brain Voyage	N/A	Eidos	228	E
Bratz: Super Babyz	N/A	THQ	226	E
Build-A-Bear Workshop	N/A	The Game Factory	223	E
Cake Mania 2	6.5	Majesco	230	E
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	N/A	Activision	223	T
Carnival Games	4.5	2K Games	231	E
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	E10+
Civilization Revolution	7.5	2K Games	231	E10+
Code Lyoko: Fall of Xana	N/A	The Game Factory	230	E
Commando: Steel Disaster	N/A	XS Games	229	E10+
Corvette Evolution GT	N/A	Jack of All Games	223	E
Cooking Mama 2: Dinner with Friends	7.0	Majesco	223	E
Crosswords DS	N/A	Nintendo	228	E
Dementium: The Ward	8.5	Gamecock	223	M
Disgaea DS	7.5	NIS America	233	T
Draglade	7.5	Atlus	224	E10+
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	7.5	Square Enix	233	E10+
Dream Pinball 3D	N/A	Southpeak	228	E10+
Drone Tactics	7.0	Atlus	229	E10+
Dungeon Explorer: Warriors of Ancient Arts	6.5	Hudson	226	T
Etrian Odyssey II: Heroes of Lagaard	8.5	Atlus	230	E10+
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	6.0	System 3	233	E
Final Fantasy IV	9.0	Square Enix	231	E10+
Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings	7.5	Square Enix	223	E10+
• Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	7.0	Square Enix	226	E10+
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	7.0	Square Enix	230	E10+
Garfield Gets Real	N/A	Destination	223	E
Godzilla Unleashed: Double Smash	3.0	Atari	224	E
The Golden Compass	N/A	Sega	223	E10+
• GRID	8.5	Codemasters	230	E
Guitar Hero: On Tour	8.0	RedOctane	232	E10+
Hannah Montana: Music Jam	N/A	Disney Interactive	223	E
Harvest Moon DS Cute	7.5	Natsume	226	E
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness	7.0	Natsume	231	E
Homie Rollerz	N/A	Destineer	226	E
Impossible Mission	N/A	Codemasters	223	E
The Incredible Hulk	7.5	Sega	231	E10+
Indy 500 Legends	N/A	Destineer	224	E
Insecticide	6.5	Gamecock	226	E10+
Iron Man	5.0	Sega	229	E10+
Izuna 2: The Unemployed Ninja Returns	5.0	Atlus	232	T
Jackass: The Game	N/A	Red Mile Entertainment	225	T
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	5.0	Aksys	229	T
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
Left Brain, Right Brain	N/A	Majesco	224	E
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E
LifeSigns: Surgical Unit	N/A	Dreamcatcher	223	T
Line Rider 2: Unbound	N/A	Genius Products	232	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Looney Tunes: Cartoon Conductor	6.5	Eidos	230	E
Lost in Blue 3	5.5	Konami	227	E10+
Madden NFL 09	N/A	Electronic Arts	232	E
• Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	7.5	Sega	225	E
Mario Party DS	8.0	Nintendo	223	E
Master of Illusion	N/A	Nintendo	223	E
• Mega Man Star Force 2	7.0	Capcom	230	E
Miami Nights: Singles in the City	N/A	Ubisoft	225	T
Mister Slime	6.0	Southpeak	230	E
MLB 2K8 Fantasy All-Stars	6.5	2K Sports	228	E
Monster Jam	N/A	Activision	223	E
The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor	N/A	Vivendi Games	231	T
MX vs. ATV Untamed	6.0	THQ	224	E
My Horse and Me	N/A	Atari	225	E
Myst	5.0	Empire Interactive	227	E
Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer	6.5	Sega	226	E
• N+	7.0	Atari	228	E
Nancy Drew: The Mystery of the Clue Bender Society	N/A	Majesco	232	E10+
• Nanostray 2	6.0	Majesco	225	E
Naruto: Ninja Destiny	7.0	Tomy/D3PA	226	T
• Need For Speed ProStreet	N/A	Electronic Arts	223	E
• New International Track and Field	8.0	Konami	232	E10+
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	8.5	Tecmo	227	T
Ninja Reflex	N/A	Electronic Arts	227	E10+
Ontamarama	7.0	Atlus	223	E
Orcs & Elves	5.0	Electronic Arts	223	T
Panzer Tactics DS	N/A	Conspiracy	223	E10+
Petz: Bunnyz	N/A	Ubisoft	227	E
Petz Wild Animals: Tigerz	N/A	Ubisoft	227	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Exlporers of Time	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
Pop Cutie! Street Fashion Simulation	6.0	Koei	233	E
• Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	N/A	Konami	227	E
• Professor Layton and the Curious Village	8.5	Nintendo	225	E
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.0	NIS America	228	E
Puppy Palace	N/A	Ubisoft	225	E
Puzzle de Harvest Moon	N/A	Natsume	223	E
Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	N/A	Ubisoft	223	E10+
• River King: Mystic Valley	7.0	Natsume	225	E
Rondo of Swords	6.5	Atlus	228	E10+
Sega Superstars Tennis	8.0	Sega	227	E
The Simpsons Game	N/A	Electronic Arts	223	T
Soul Bubbles	6.5	Eidos	230	E
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E
Space Invaders Extreme	8.0	Square Enix	230	E
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Spore Creatures	N/A	Electronic Arts	233	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	6.0	LucasArts	233	T
Strawberry Shortcake: 4 Seasons Cake	N/A	Jack of All Games	224	E
Summon Night: Twin Age	7.5	Atlus	229	E10+
Super Dodgeball Brawlers	6.5	Aksys	229	E
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop 3	N/A	Namco Bandai	230	E
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys	7.0	Ignition	228	E10+
Top Spin 3	6.0	2K Sports	229	E
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.5	Atlus	231	T
Ultimate Mortal Kombat	N/A	Midway	223	M
• Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise	N/A	THQ	233	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
• Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command	8.0	THQ	224	T
Wordjong	N/A	Destineer	224	E
• The World Ends With You	9.0	Square Enix	228	T
• Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2008	N/A	Konami	224	E
Zoo Tycoon 2 DS	7.0	THQ	226	E

GUITAR HERO: AEROSMITH

I may not be the biggest fan of Aerosmith, but I certainly love Guitar Hero, and Guitar Hero: Aerosmith definitely delivers in that respect. It doesn't have the variety of other GH games, but it's still tons of fun to play. Even if you haven't listened to Aerosmith much—like me—you'll still enjoy the game, and you might find a few new songs for your iPod while you're at it.

—TOM H.

WE LOVE GOLF!

Solid swing mechanics and an infectiously cheery presentation make We Love Golf my favorite Wii links title. However, its mandatory motion control is a hassle when I want to veg out on the couch, and quick-fix tournaments and character duels don't make for compelling long-term goals.

—CHRIS SL.

ORDER UP!

When I'm not playing games, I sometimes watch TV shows like *Top Chef* and *Hell's Kitchen*. What I've learned from those programs is that an important part of being a successful chef is managing your time well. And that's what sets Order Up! apart from other cooking games on Wii—you can start to feel the pressure in the kitchen as you're quickly cooking quality meals to keep your customers happy.

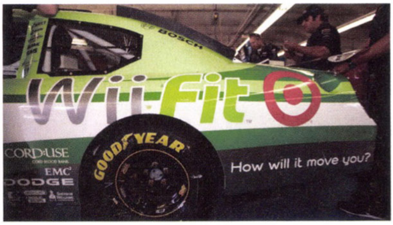
—JUSTIN C.

COMMUNITY

EVENTS

Shake and Bake

Nintendo and NASCAR prove to be a great racing team.



As quickly as Wii Fit continues to fly off store shelves, it never moved faster than on May 25, when its name was plastered all over the No. 40 Dodge Charger in the Coca-Cola 600 in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series. The car didn't win the race (it finished 31st out of 43 cars), but it offered Nintendo an unparalleled advertising opportunity: to have the eyes of millions fixed upon its new fitness brand for hours.

The Wii Fit car is only one of many video game-sponsored NASCAR vehicles we've seen in the last two seasons, including cars based on Guitar Hero: Aerosmith, Halo 3, and even the Wii console. You might think the appeal of the sponsorship would be lost at triple-digit speeds, but according to Steve Lauletta, president of Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates, which ran the Wii Fit and Guitar Hero: Aerosmith vehicles in association with retail giant Target, NASCAR fans fervently support the companies and products that sponsor their favorite drivers.

"There are 75 million core NASCAR fans in the nation, and they're very brand-loyal," claims Lauletta. "They realize that it takes a lot of sponsorship dollars for their favorite driver to be on the track, so when a company supports their sport and their driver in particular, they go out of their way to make sure that they show support of that brand or company."

As you can see from the photos, each sponsored car is uniquely designed to provide the best possible promotion for that particular game. Though lesser sponsors still get to put their logos on designated areas of a car, the primary sponsor is able to use the vast majority of the car's body to send its message exactly as it sees fit. "It's a great clear canvas to bring your product to life," notes Lauletta. "The Guitar Hero car and Wii Fit car were really impactful when they were on the track, and they were heavily covered by the media. I think the partners that we've worked with have done a really nice job of taking advantage of that."

Lauletta says that video games have become increasingly popular with drivers and crewmembers, who must fill the downtime between races and other obligations during the 10-month NASCAR season. "A lot of the drivers are gamers, including myself," says No. 40 driver Dario Franchitti, who previously raced in CART and was the 2007 IndyCar Series champion before moving to NASCAR late last year. He continues, "I think every driver has video game consoles in their motor coaches. We are on the road a lot so we need things to occupy our time."

"They're all really into gaming and I think that also allows the real honesty and ability for them to talk about something they're into, as opposed to marketing something that is foreign to them," adds Lauletta. Franchitti drives that point home, commenting, "For the same reason fans like racing, they also like video games. They're fast, fun, and exciting."

True as that may be, it's still a matter of business—not just from the perspective of the advertiser, but also the racing team that must pay the exorbitant bills that come with racing stock cars on a national stage. In fact, the reason Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates had been able to run one-off themed cars recently is because the No. 40 car lacked a season-long primary sponsor for the Sprint Cup—a situation that came to a head on July 1, when Ganassi shut down the No. 40 Sprint Cup team due to lack of funding. Franchitti has since been driving the car in the NASCAR Nationwide Series—the less-visible sibling of the Sprint Cup—even qualifying first for the Zippo 200 at Watkins Glen International in New York on August 9.

Traditional game-release windows have to date resulted in only single-race sponsorships, but Lauletta believes we may see longer commitments in the future. "I think the opportunity is there," he shares, commenting on multirace or extended sponsorship programs. "We're certainly going to work hard to try to pull that together and be the team that brings that to the market and to the fans, both NASCAR fans and gamers."

Until then, we will likely see gaming-themed sponsored vehicles popping up throughout the lengthy NASCAR season. Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates revealed to Nintendo Power that it is currently in discussions with Activision and RedOctane to run a Guitar Hero: World Tour car at the Atlanta Motor Speedway in late October, though it had no official announcement to make at press time. **—ANDREW H.**

POKÉMON

World Champs!

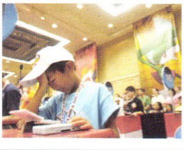
What happens when more than 400 of the best Pokémon players from around the globe head to Florida for two days of trading, training, and battling? Simple: world-class Champions emerge.

The top 350 Pokémon Trading Card Game (TCG) players from nearly 30 countries met at the 2008 Pokémon Trading Card Game World Championships in Orlando in mid-August to battle for the top spot in three age divisions. Masters Division Champion Jason Klaczynski, who has been an active Pokémon player (of both video games and TCG) for 10 years, made history by winning his second Championship. (He won in 2006 as well.) Jason had this to say about his winning strategy: "My deck was built around Gardevoir and Gallade. Gallade has the ability to one-hit KO almost anything my opponent throws at me, and Gardevoir has a Psychic Lock attack that stops Poké-Powers from running all over you." NP also asked Jason about the tensest moment of the tournament: "In Top 4, I was paired against this year's U.S. Champion, Gino Lombardi," Jason told us. "Gino has played countless matches against decks like mine (that use Gardevoir and Gallade) and he has a ton of experience playing against them. After tying the series at one win each, we went into our final game, and I missed drawing a crucial Energy card in the opening turns. This turned out to be huge, and the game began slipping away from me. However, as the game progressed and the time limit started nearing, we were pressured to play faster and I was able to capitalize on a combination of small mistakes and a lucky draw that allowed a 130-damage Psychic Lock from a Gardevoir to win the game."

The Pokémon Video Game Showdown took place at the same time and featured the top *Pokémon Diamond* and *Pokémon Pearl* players from the United States and Japan in two competitive divisions. Junior Division champion Knight Silvayne—a Pokémon player since he was just three years old—won a trip to Japan for his skillful battling. One of Knight's favorite strategies is to use Earthquake while his second Pokémon is safely flying or levitating. And what's his advice to aspiring Trainers: "Think positive, believe in yourself, test your strategy against as many people as you can, and have fun." Spoken like a true champ.

—SCOTT P.

Pokémon Video Game Showdown 2008

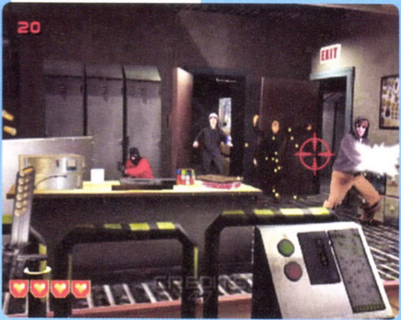


WRITE YOUR OWN CAPTION

Screen Test

Thank you, readers—while we were expecting some creepy captions for Volume 232's Summon Night: Twin Age screenshot, we actually got some creative, not-so-creepy ones that you can check out below. This month, we're targeting terror wherever there's trouble. We haven't decided how yet, but send a caption to screentest@nintendopower.com anyway.

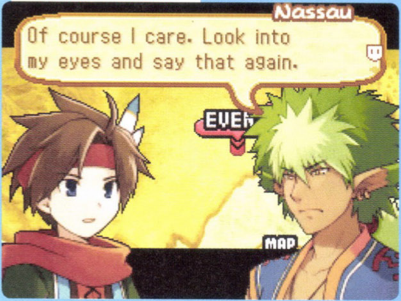
THIS MONTH'S SHOT



"How can we tell people it's fun to stay at the YMCA if you keep shooting first?"

HERE'S OUR CAPTION. Think you can do better?

VOLUME 232'S SHOT



Nassau

Of course I care. Look into my eyes and say that again.

"I'm sorry, what were you saying? I was distracted by your half-eaten ears...." —NICK A.

"You know, we don't actually talk. These weird bubbles pop up and say what we were going to say." —TYLER R.

"Sorry, your eyes are so small and your hair is so big!" —JAMES C.

"OK—'that again.'" —POKEMONROX96

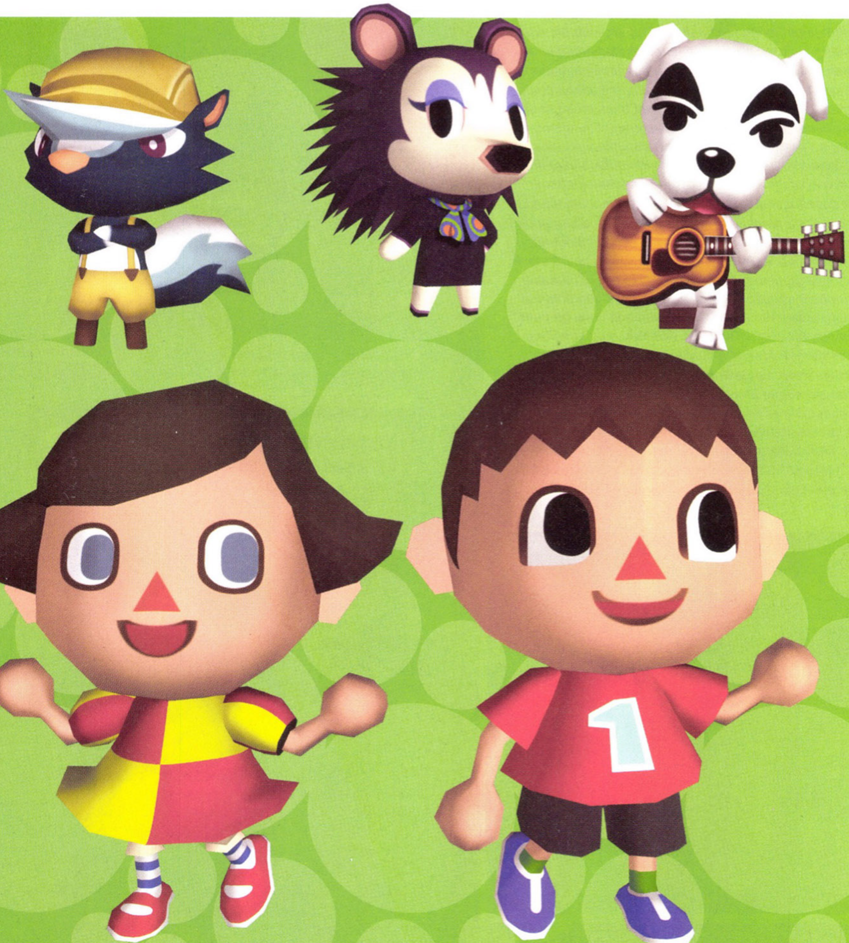
"Well, your voice and cold hard glare scream, 'I don't care.'" —PRINCESS JENNIEO OF HYRULE64

"Why don't you stare into *my* eyes for once, you lazy bum!" —JORDAN

"That's...great, Nassau, but you're not...um...my type." —ELIZABETH

NEXT MONTH

In 30 days we'll present an in-depth look at the season's biggest Wii game, Animal Crossing: City Folk, along with detailed coverage of Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia, Chrono Trigger, Suikoden: Tierkreis, and loads more!



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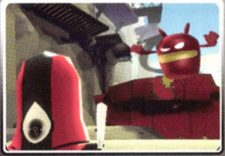
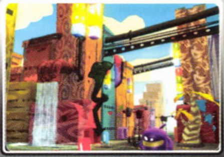

Dodge ink cannons, flatten I.N.K.T. tanks and outsmart Inky soldiers.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